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THIS MONTH AT

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PRESENTS

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2016'S ULTIMATE FILM & ENTERTAINMENT WEEKEND

Live

HOLY MOLY, THAT was quite a few days. Were you there? We hope so! Halfway through making this issue, we decamped to The O2 in London for the very first Empire Live — 2016's ultimate film and entertainment weekend. Consisting of 39 screenings, panels and events over two days and three nights, we lived, breathed (and probably dreamed) the very best of film and TV. My personal highlights included the exclusive first UK screening of *Hacksaw Ridge*, Mike Colter talking through brand-new clips from *Luke Cage*, a live *Trainspotting* script read, a *This Is England* 10th Anniversary screening, a standing-room-only panel on Women On Screen and, of course, our opening night double bill gala screening of *Imperium* and *Swiss Army Man* attended by the wonderful Daniel Radcliffe. As you can probably tell, it was a pretty damn brilliant weekend. The absolute best bit, though? Meeting so many of you. To see how much you love *Empire* and, more importantly, how much you love film, made our hearts swell with recognition and pride. It was kind of like hanging out with your best mates for a whole weekend and we couldn't have enjoyed ourselves more. So thank you: thank you for buying tickets, for travelling for miles, for throwing yourselves into it with such gusto (especially those who donned protective suits and got slimed at our special *Ghostbusters* screening) and for giving us so much great feedback on what you thought about the whole shebang. There's still time to share your thoughts — just drop me a line at terri@empiremagazine.com. Same time next year?

Terri



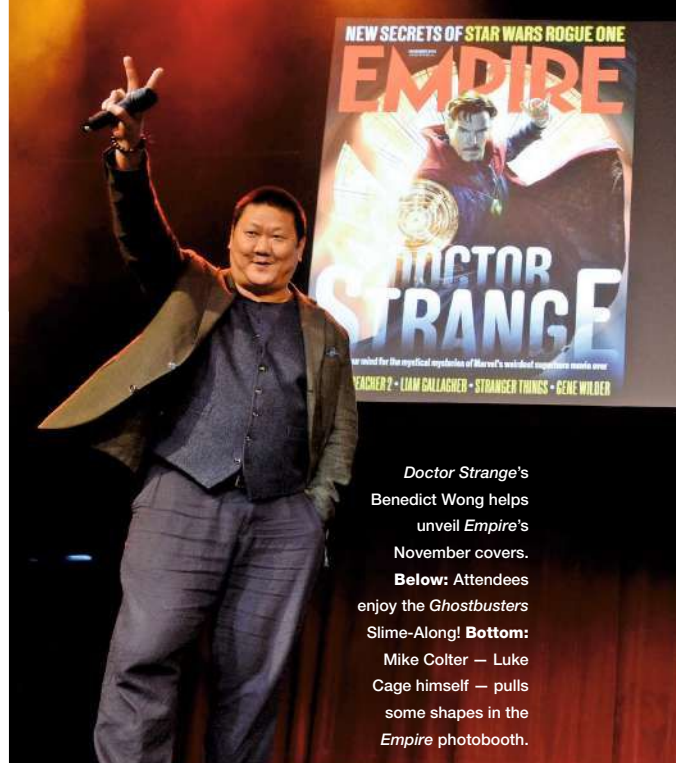
TERRI WHITE
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



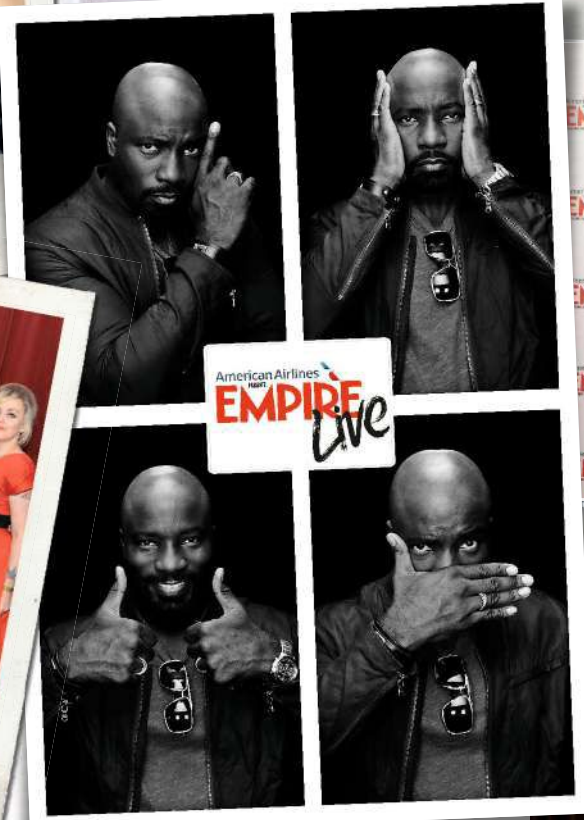
Ben Wheatley showcases footage from his new film *Free Fire* before screening *High-Rise*.



Amma Asante, Hayley Squires, Kate Crowther, Cara Theobald, Natalie Dormer and Terri White talk Women On Screen.



Doctor *Strange's* Benedict Wong helps unveil *Empire's* November covers. **Below:** Attendees enjoy the *Ghostbusters* Slime-Along! **Bottom:** Mike Colter — Luke Cage himself — pulls some shapes in the *Empire* photobooth.





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Live



Top: Alive Daniel Radcliffe hangs with dead Daniel Radcliffe. Here: Jason Isaacs attempts My Movie Mastermind with Chris Hewitt.



Above: *This Is England*'s Jo Hartley, Andrew Ellis, Chanel Cresswell and Andrew Shim celebrate double figures. **Left:** Jim Sturgess checks the hairiness of his arse during our live *How Much Is A Pint Of Milk?*. Helen O'Hara doesn't know where to look. **Right:** Jim Hosking, director of *The Greasy Strangler*, introduces his lard-faced cult favourite.



THANK YOU

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CONTENTS

FEATURES

66 FANTASTIC BEASTS AND WHERE TO FIND THEM

A *Harry Potter* film minus Harry Potter. There is a giant dung beetle though, so that's something.

74 THE 30 GREATEST HARRY POTTER CHARACTERS

#31: Griphook the Goblin. #32: Professor Flitwick. #33: Goblin Bank Teller.

80 15 YEARS OF DONNIE DARKO

We reunite director Richard Kelly and Frank The Rabbit for an exclusive look back at stupid man-suits and Sparkle Motion.

88 NICOLAS CAGE

Shivering but valiant, we venture into the mind of Nicolas Cage. God willing, we shall emerge with valuable knowledge for all mankind.

94 THE CROWN

This Netflix show is so huge, it caused a national gold-coach-and-coronet shortage.

98 AARON ECKHART

I believe in Harvey Dent. Also in Kevin Rooney, President Benjamin Asher and Truck-Stop Patron. Eckhart's so versatile.

104 A UNITED KINGDOM

Amma Asante on a love story that changed a continent. Which makes us ponder how successful our relationships really are.

110 BATMAN AT 50

ZONK! The original Batman, Adam West, on 50 years in the cape and his new animated Bats.

PRE.VIEW

12 RAW

The title of this cannibal film is just wrong. Everyone knows people are best fricasseed.

24 THE GREAT WALL

Alright wall, there's no need to brag.

28 PASSENGERS

Earth's hottest stars leave the planet to build a new colony, presumably named Phwoar-topia.

34 THE WITNESS FOR THE PROSECUTION

In the BBC's previous Christie adaptation, the judge dunnit. Could that be the twist here, too?

Clockwise from here:

Fantastic Beasts And Where To Find Them

(p66, since you ask);

The Great Wall;

Star Wars: The Force

Awakens; *Arrival*;

Donnie Darko.



ON.SCREEN

38 ARRIVAL

In an exciting first, scientists have proved science-fiction and Oscar buzz *can* co-exist.

48 THE LIGHT BETWEEN OCEANS

Alicia Vikander and Michael Fassbender go to a lighthouse. Take that, Virginia Woolf.

56 JACK REACHER: NEVER GO BACK

Films also teach never say never again, never back down, never let me go and never-ending story.

64 BATMAN: ARKHAM VR

Who wouldn't want a realistic, immersive visit to Gotham and its demented baddies?

RE.VIEW

118 THE NEON DEMON

A viewing guide for Winding Refn's latest, a fun film about models for the entire family.

126 KES

Our 50th anniversary retrospective, three years early. It's good to be ahead of the crowd.

136 STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS

We listened to J.J. Abrams' new commentary so you don't have to. But you might want to anyway.

140 THE FIRST-TAKE CLUB: AMELIE

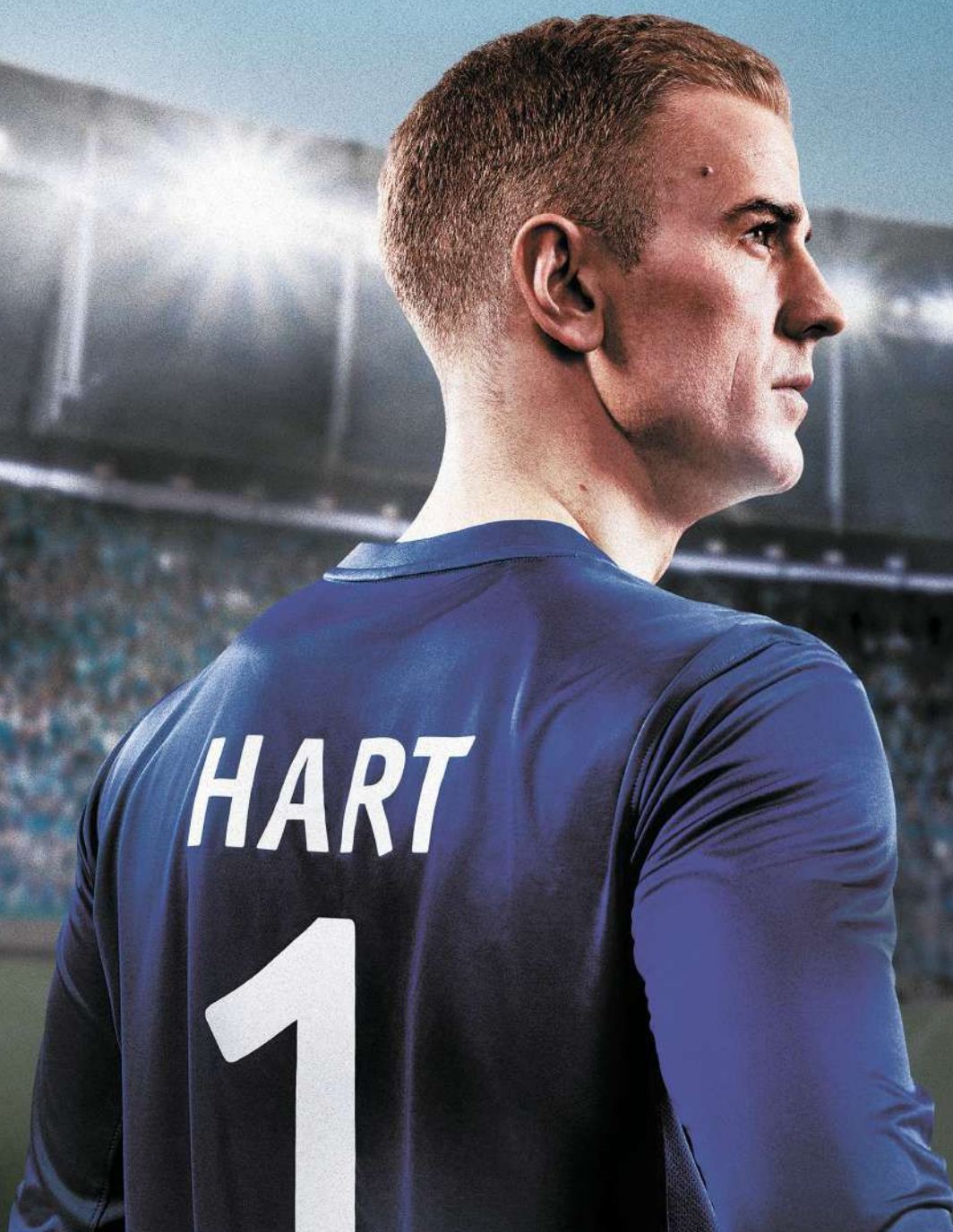
Ian Rankin tackles a French classic, so grab a garden gnome and *amusez-vous bien, les gars*.

SPINE LINE ANSWERS ISSUE 329: NEWSSTAND: "THERE'S TALK OF STRANGE FOLK ABROAD. CAN'T BE TOO CAREFUL" IS FROM THE LORD OF THE RINGS; THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING. SUBS: "BE ADVISED: CLOWNS ARE HOSTAGES, DOCTORS ARE TARGETS" IS FROM THE DARK KNIGHT.



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CARRY ANYTHING**

BUT DANDRUFF



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TALK TO US

COMMENT OF THE MONTH

TEESSIDE CONFIDENTIAL

I was 15 when *L.A. Confidential* was released in 1997. I went to see it at the Showcase Teesside with my friend Nathan, and he brought along some other friends, whom I'd never met before. Among the crowd was a girl my own age named Sarah. Flash-forward a year or so, and we had begun dating. Flash-forward to 2016, and we've been married for six years and have two daughters.

L.A. Confidential is a masterpiece and the late Curtis Hanson should be praised for delivering one of the greatest film noirs of the past 50 years. But for Sarah and me, it's our first film. It's where it all started. Thanks for listening, keep up the good work and — for what it's worth — I don't know if I'd have bothered going to see it if I hadn't read about it in *Empire* beforehand.

DAVID HESLOP, VIA EMAIL

That's a lovely tale, David, and proof that even hard-boiled films about corrupt cops covering up evidence can bring people together. Best wishes to you, Sarah and your daughters, whom we're guessing are named Rolo and Tomassi.



Empire's star letter wins a Picturehouse Membership, plus one for a friend! Valid for one year at 23 Picturehouse Cinemas across the UK, including the flagship Picturehouse Central in London's West End, each membership comes pre-loaded with four free tickets, and gets you access to priority booking and exclusive discounts on everything in the cinema. When you write to us, please ensure you include your full contact details so we can arrange delivery of your prize.



MATT WELLS ON THE PROSPECT OF A GUY RITCHIE ALADDIN REMAKE:
"ALADDIN IS A STORY ABOUT CRIMINALS STEALING JEWELS AND GOLD — IT'S NOT MUCH OF A PLOT SHIFT FROM LOCK STOCK. VINNIE JONES WOULD MAKE A GREAT GEEZIE... I MEAN GENIE. 'YOU HAVE THREE FUCKING WISHES.'"

JACKING IT IN

Congrats to Chris Hewitt on the way he snuck all 20 Lee Child book titles into the article on *Jack Reacher: Never Go Back*. Particularly smart as I didn't spot what was going on until about three quarters of the way through.

STEVE BENSON, VIA EMAIL

Chris says it's a massive coincidence.

PROPS TO KARL

Could I be the biggest film fanatic in the world? I own several screen-matched film props, including the glasses worn by Ivan Vanko in the prologue of *Iron Man 2*, the set of weights used in the gym in *Prometheus* and a photo frame used in *Dredd*.

KARL CHAPMAN, SUFFOLK

This is the best Ivan Vanko-based brag we've received this month. Can anyone match or exceed Karl's collection of memorabilia? Let us know.



TWO OF MY FAVOURITE THINGS COLLIDED THIS MONTH:
@EMPIREMAGAZINE & @ANNAKENDRICK47. GOT TO GET ME AN INVITE TO ONE OF HER MOVIE MARATHONS!

@DAVIDROBBO66

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PRE.VIEW

PULSE-QUICKENING MOVIE AND TV NEWS

EDITED BY HELEN O'HARA



FIRST LOOK
EXCLUSIVE

RAW

OUT 2017

FLESH AND BLOOD

How sister cannibals put their first-time director on the map

WORDS IAN FREER

"I WAS VERY sorry for the people who fainted," says *Raw* director Julia Ducournau of two viewers at the film's Toronto Film Festival screening in September. "Consequently, the film was presented as a gore-fest, which it is not."

Raw is a cannibal coming-of-age tale, in which 16-year-old vegetarian Justine (Garance Marillier), encouraged by her sister Alexia (Ella Rumpf), eats raw chicken liver as a college prank, and begins a slide into cannibalism.

"I wanted [to put] the audience in the shoes of [someone] they might consider a monster, in order to realise she is not a monster," says Ducournau. "She is not a werewolf. Cannibalism is a taboo of humanity but it belongs to humanity." The prosthetics and ragged sex make *Raw* undeniably visceral, but at its (tasty) heart, it's about what makes us human.

The film's depiction of Justine and Alexia is also a complex portrayal of sisterhood, a "beautiful bond that lies between love, hate, rivalry and complicity".

Raw caught Hollywood's attention, but Ducournau is resistant. "Agents are chasing me, which feels weird," she says. "I try to keep a grasp on reality by working." Her next feature concerns a female serial killer, so it might be best to stock up on smelling salts in advance.

THE BOY FROM MARS

Director Peter Chelsom explains how *The Space Between Us* harks back to '80s classics

WORDS HELEN O'HARA

"I HAVE KIDS, so I have to sit through a lot of crap," says director Peter Chelsom. "Do you ever go to see those films that ten-year-olds go to see? It's like two hours in an ashtray. You're just exhausted. [But] when I read this script I went, 'This is the kind of movie Robert Zemeckis would have made in the 1980s,' and I thought, 'Well, that's great.'"

The script that so impressed the *Serendipity* director was *The Space Between Us*, a science-fiction story about Gardner Elliot (Asa Butterfield), a boy born on a scientific mission to Mars. His astronaut mother dies in childbirth and, too small to survive take-off and a return to Earth, he grows up surrounded by scientists on the Red Planet. It's only as a teenager that he gets the chance to visit his true home — but there are doubts his heart, accustomed to Mars' lower gravity, can keep him alive back on Earth.

The film isn't aimed at Chelsom's ten-year-old, necessarily, but he wanted it to be something that would entertain all ages. "It's the balance between that massive scope and that good, strong heart," says Chelsom. "It has a nice theme

to it. It seems to me it's about isolation and connection, amplified by the vastness of space."

While Mars is the backdrop for the story, much of it takes place back on Earth. And as Gardner is seeing everything for the very first time, you need a relatable actor who can convey a sense of wonder. That's where Butterfield — already a veteran of thoughtful sci-fi in *Ender's Game* — proved key. "Asa just has such a natural curiosity in his face. There's an absolutely innate naivety about him that works. He's very unto himself, odd in a good way. I pushed him into quite a bit of range in this movie; you can even see it in the trailer. I found the comedian in him and the romantic in him. He's lovely."

Even before arriving on Earth, Gardner had been busy online and befriended Tulsa (Britt Robertson) — another sci-fi veteran thanks to *Tomorrowland: A World Beyond*, a girl his own age who's unaware of his origins. With her help he sets off on a road trip across the US in search of the father he has never known. "Britt is really feisty and just a strong woman," explains Chelsom. "You see this arc that Tulsa goes [on]. [At first] she's the foster child that's really defensive and very brittle, then you see this softening, because she's always on the attack and he completely disarms her by being gentle and neutral. [Britt] is a terrific actress; she directs herself really, really well."

Providing veteran support are Gary Oldman as the NASA director responsible for the Mars programme ("God, it's nice to have a Brit on



Top: Tulsa (Britt Robertson) and Gardner Elliot (Asa Butterfield) are floating on air. Above: NASA Director Nathaniel Shepherd (Gary Oldman) introduces Gardner. Here and below: Gardner's Red Planet home.





the set, someone who gets the fucking joke”) and Carla Gugino (“always, always wonderful”) as one of the Mars-based scientists who raises Gardner. The film shot at Sir Richard Branson’s Spaceport America in New Mexico, in an effort to ensure a real-world feel to the sci-fi. “My rule about CGI is, let’s always try to make it feasible,” explains Chelsom. “I often make the camera angles, say, look like actual little cameras that would be attached to the side of the rocket, with Mars in the background.”

The final cut may be reminiscent of films such as *Flight Of The Navigator*, *D.A.R.Y.L.* or *The Explorers*, but it’s no mere rehash, says Chelsom. “It’s not that I copy or emulate other directors. I’m very unto myself and I’ve had a strange career. So I do admire Zemeckis but I didn’t channel him. It’s about range and pace. That’s what I love about *The Space Between Us*: it’s various films at once. It’s heavy action and sci-fi and at times it feels like a sweet, low-budget romance. And there’s nothing massively produced about it. I think that kind of undulating thing is what people miss. It’s films that don’t overwhelm you with noise; they don’t do it by bombarding you, but with heart.” It’s ironic that the film’s love story is threatened by its hero’s weak heart. But signs are that’s the only heart that’s lacking.

THE SPACE BETWEEN US IS IN CINEMAS FROM 10 FEBRUARY 2017



Above: Villainous ghost Pirate Captain Salazar (Javier Bardem). Here: Jack Sparrow is a wanted man (again).

RATED AAARRRRRRR

Your need-to-know update on the fifth instalment in the *Pirates Of The Caribbean* franchise

WORDS HELEN O'HARA

SO WHAT EXACTLY IS ITS TITLE?

This is a surprisingly tough question. In the US, it’s officially *Pirates Of The Caribbean: Dead Men Tell No Tales*, but here in the UK it will be subtitled *Salazar’s Revenge*. And in France, Spain, Italy and a few other countries it’s slightly different again, going by *The Revenge Of Salazar*. Perhaps all these aliases are useful to conceal its piratical identity — or it could be down to a conflict with the BBC documentary *Dead Men Tell No Tales*.

WHAT’S THE STORY?

Well, we can deduce that Javier Bardem’s Captain Salazar, the “deadly ghost pirate” — them again — who looks like a drowned man in the teaser trailer, is out for revenge on his nemesis, Jack Sparrow (Johnny Depp). Salazar and his men have escaped the ‘Devil’s Triangle’ (the devil lives in Bermuda?) and Cap’n Jack

must race him to the Trident Of Poseidon to prevent him gaining control of the seas.

ISN’T ORLANDO BLOOM BACK?

Yes — after sitting out the fourth film Bloom will once again be playing Will Turner. An unguarded remark about his son suggests that his baby with Keira (who we saw in the post-credit sting of *Pirates Of The Caribbean: At World’s End*) is all grown up and looking for his father — and everyone suspects Brenton Thwaites’ Henry is Turner Jr. Chances are Henry will be romancing Kaya Scodelario’s astronomer, Carina — who in one version of the script was Captain Barbosa’s (Geoffrey Rush) daughter.

WHO’S DIRECTING?

Half of Hollywood was rumoured for the job, including original *Pirates Of The Caribbean: The Curse Of The Black Pearl* director Gore Verbinski and Depp regular Tim Burton. But it was Joachim Rønning and Espen Sandberg, the Norwegian directors of tense ocean drama *Kon-Tiki*, who landed the job, shooting in Australia last year.

ANY FAMOUS MUSICAL CAMEOS?

While Keith Richard expressed an interest in reprising his role as Captain Teague, there has been no official confirmation of that. But more surprisingly, there are rumours that Paul McCartney may appear. Well, he does live in a yellow submarine...

PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN: SALAZAR’S REVENGE IS IN CINEMAS FROM 26 MAY 2017

ELLE RAISER



Director Paul Verhoeven on set with Isabelle Huppert.

Controversial director Paul Verhoeven returns — with his most contentious film yet

WORDS SIMON CROOK

MOST FILMMAKERS MELLOW with age. Not Paul Verhoeven. Returning to feature films after a decade-long absence, the 77-year-old director has made one of his most provocative projects ever: an unclassifiable black comedy that ruthlessly subverts the rape-revenge genre, and every audience expectation. In *Elle*, Isabelle Huppert plays Michèle, a Parisian video-game exec who, in her opening scene, is viciously raped by a masked intruder. But rather than report the assault she engages in a twisted game of cat-and-mouse with her attacker.

"It's been called a 'rape comedy', but that's not right," says Verhoeven when *Empire* meets him in London. "The rape isn't funny, and definitely not entertaining. Shooting those scenes was tense,

dangerous and very carefully choreographed. Isabelle was given complete freedom, and had no problem filming the sequences: we wanted to make it as shocking as possible."

Elle was meant to be Verhoeven's American comeback, with the script relocating Philippe Djian's novel to Boston, but every A-list actress, including Nicole Kidman, declined. "Hollywood has lost its appetite for risk and audacity," he sighs. "*Elle* didn't obey the third-act rule of revenge, so it was rejected." When the film was returned to Paris, Verhoeven found his muse: Huppert. A fan of the book, Huppert had previously campaigned for the role ("You could say she chose me rather than I chose her").

Verhoeven's reasons for selecting *Elle* are surprising, but reveal a lot about his vision. A devotee of Luis Buñuel, he saw parallels with the notorious satire *Belle Du Jour*: both feature icy, bourgeois women who discover liberation through transgressive desires (Huppert has called the film both a "fantasy" and "a fairy tale"). And it doesn't get much more transgressive than Michèle developing a relationship with her rapist. "This is not a film about all women,"

Verhoeven stresses. "It's a very specific character study of a very strange character. What attracted me, and Isabelle, was that Michèle refuses to accept her 'role' as a victim. I strongly feel it is an optimistic movie: the attack, ultimately, frees [her] from the demons of her past."

Still, Verhoeven is dancing through a minefield. The damaged daughter of a serial-killer, Michèle is ambiguous, perhaps a sociopath, but her rebuttal of victimhood has seen some hail her as feminist. Others say that Verhoeven's tonal shifts from horror to laughter trivialise a serious subject. "Ah, but life is not one genre," protests Verhoeven. "Life changes genre every second. There's no dogma that says a film about something as horrible as rape can't also make you smile. The humour absolutely does not trivialise it. What's surprised me, at Cannes, at Toronto, is the way audiences have received the film. I'm astonished there hasn't been more controversy." Verhoeven pauses, then smiles cautiously. "Yet..."

ELLE IS IN CINEMAS FROM 24 FEBRUARY 2017

ISSEY MIYAKE
L'EAU D'ISSEY
POUR HOMME





DRESSED TO KILL

Yeah, we're thinking he's back. Keanu's contact killer returns in *John Wick: Chapter 2*

WORDS JAMES DYER

THE *JOHN WICK* Kill Counter on YouTube allows you to re-live every fatal shot, stab, snap and boom of the 2014 film's 101 minutes. They killed his dog, they stole his '69 Mustang and, in response, Keanu Reeves' retired contract killer put 76 Russian mobsters in the ground.

"That number's a little light," corrects director Chad Stahelski. "I saw that video, but

they forgot to count the guys in the various SUVs he crashed and blew up. If you include them then it's actually 84."

Shot for just \$20 million, *John Wick* raked in a respectable \$130 million worldwide and showed a hard-edged, ass-kicking side of Reeves that has been largely absent since 1999's *The Matrix* — where Stahelski worked as Reeves' stunt double. *John Wick: Chapter 2* picks up almost immediately after the first film, with Wick bloodied and beaten, 84 bodies in his wake and a new mutt at his heel. Rather than continue Wick's vengeful rampage over another outrage (a stolen parking space, perhaps, or a lukewarm latte) the sequel broadens both mythology and canvas. Stahelski (this time without *John Wick*

co-director David Leitch) takes us deeper into the otherworldly sub-culture of Ian McShane's hitman hotel, The Continental, while at the same time transporting much of the gunplay from New York to Rome.

"The first film's about fate; this one is about consequence," says the director. "If he hadn't done what he did in the first movie, he wouldn't have reactivated his old life, which causes a ripple effect and makes an old acquaintance knock on his door and say, 'Since you're back, I need you to kill someone.'"

That acquaintance is Riccardo Scamarcio's Santino, who pulls Wick into a civil war between members of a Roman crime family. Cue guns, lots of guns, as Wick takes on half the Italian



Clockwise from left: John Wick (Keanu Reeves) is back on the warpath; Santino (Riccardo Scamarcio) with Ares (Ruby Rose); Pigeon fancier The Bowery King (Laurence Fishburne, who hasn't worked with Reeves since *The Matrix Revolutions* back in 2003).

underworld, including Santino's private army, led by head of security Ares (*Orange Is the New Black*'s Ruby Rose).

As with the first film, *Chapter 2* eschews the staccato editing of Greengrass and his imitators, opting instead for gloriously wide master shots in the traditional Hong Kong style. Drawing on classic gun-fu cinema from the likes of John Woo and Wong Jing, the sequel takes much of the heavy lifting out of the cutting room, instead relying on the physical skills of the film's immaculately tailored star.

"If you're using fast editing to hide things, then I call bullshit: that's cheating," says Stahelski. "Luckily we have an actor who can do this stuff for real. Keanu's been doing martial

arts for 25 years, so we just don't teach him a few moves and shout, 'Action!' We've had him doing judo, sambo, jiu-jitsu; we had him learn from the best tactical three-gun shooter in the world, train with SEALs and SWAT. Then we put him in front of the camera, pass him a gun and let him show what he can do."

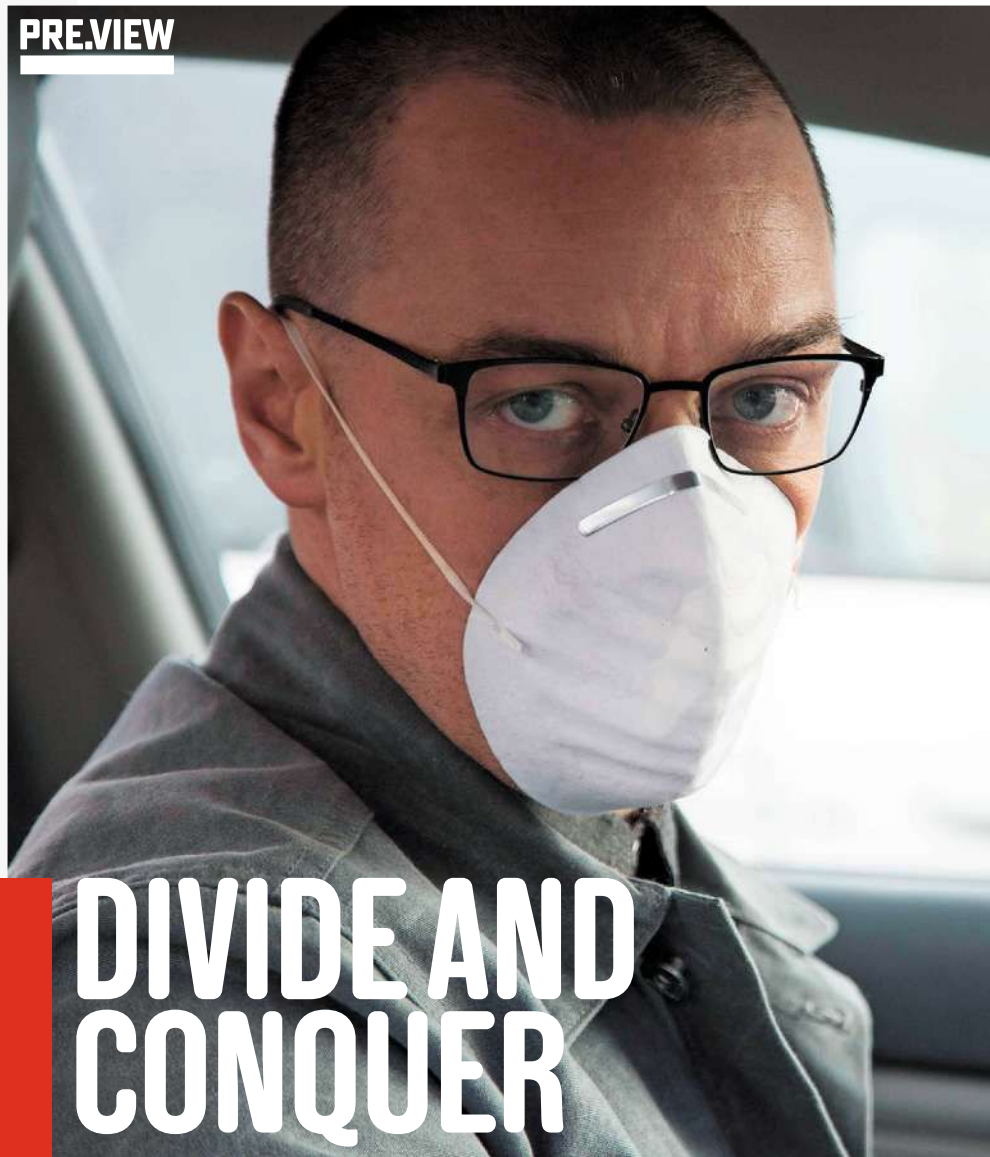
A key face-off in a mirrored art installation sees a bloodied Wick trade flurries of blows with Ares, strikingly attired in purple velvet. "The mirror room was Chad's idea," says Reeves. "It's his homage to Bruce Lee at the end of *Enter the Dragon*. The whole installation is a maze of mirrors where guys can pop out and disappear. It's very cool and a lot of fun to fight in. The action in this one is taken up a level. It's like

going back to your favourite restaurant but this time, instead of getting the fillet, you're getting the porterhouse."

A bloody meat metaphor seems appropriate for a film that hopes to repeat the success of its ultra-violent predecessor and, if fans get their wish, rack up an even larger bodycount than before. After all, Wick may have replaced the dog, but that still leaves at least one piece of unfinished business.

"Oh, he's back," says Reeves, with a grin. "I don't think it's giving away too much to say he's still going to go get his car."

JOHN WICK: CHAPTER 2 IS IN CINEMAS FROM 17 FEBRUARY 2017



DIVIDE AND CONQUER

Director M. Night Shyamalan is back, aided and abetted by James McAvoy

WORDS DAN JOLIN

SPLIT DOES NOT feel like a movie from the writer-director of *The Last Airbender* and *After Earth*. It feels more like something from the man behind *The Sixth Sense* and *Unbreakable*. Receiving a surprise premiere at Fantastic Fest in Austin, Texas, this macabre abduction drama was greeted as a triumphant return for M. Night Shyamalan (below).

The director is certainly buoyed by the positive reaction when *Empire* speaks to him two days after the screening, and admits he's enjoyed going back to "darker, more bizarre lands". At first glance, *Split* is just another kidnap drama, in which three teenage girls (including *The Witch's* Anya Taylor-Joy) are chloroformed and imprisoned in a basement. But their abductor, Kevin (James McAvoy), suffers an acute form of dissociative identity disorder, possessing (and possessed by) no

fewer than 23 personalities. Which instantly and fiendishly complicates the issue of who exactly is committing the abduction here, and why.

"I think it's an astonishing subject matter, one that I find borderline supernatural," says Shyamalan of his decision to construct this plot around a controversial condition (many psychologists hate these depictions of multiple personalities) that's powered so many thrillers before, from *Psycho*, to *Dressed To Kill*, to *Fight Club*. "I think it's amazing and I love the humanity of it. James did an incredible job connecting me to these characters. He really made me root for them no matter what they were doing."

While Joaquin Phoenix had originally been lined up for the lead role(s) and was lost to a scheduling conflict, Shyamalan quickly realised how lucky he was to have McAvoy on board.

"James is so game, he's so physically gifted. We did a lot of rehearsals, and we would talk through one character at a time and come up with their voices, and discuss what they each mean to the main character, Kevin."

Kevin's dominant personalities include a lisping child who likes dancing to Kanye, a prim, frosty British woman and a "blue-collar fella from Philadelphia" with OCD, so you're not just getting one



Masked and dangerous: James McAvoy as abductor Kevin. **Below:** Kevin does a spot of DIY in the basement. **Bottom:** Casey (Anya Taylor-Joy) tries to make her escape.



transformative performance from McAvoy in *Split*, but several. It could so easily have dissolved into OTT psycho-farce, but McAvoy is electric, displaying "explosive energy" on set, according to his director. "It's one of those parts where you have to take huge risks. And you'll either crash and burn, or you're gonna do something magical." McAvoy's greatest trick, it appears, has been to help shock the career of M. Night Shyamalan back to the level of his 'earlier, scarier' ones.

SPLIT IS IN CINEMAS FROM 20 JANUARY

THE QUOTE QUOTA

The month's most notable
TV and movie *bon mots*

"THE CIRCLES OF HELL
HAVE BEEN REARRANGED!"

ROBERT LANGDON (TOM HANKS)
IN *INFERNO*



"THESE VIOLENT DELIGHTS
HAVE VIOLENT ENDS."

DOLORES ABERNATHY (EVAN RACHEL WOOD)
IN *WESTWORLD*



"IT'S LIKE I ALWAYS SAY, BOB: IF IT
AIN'T BROKE, BREAK IT."

TERRY MONROE (ALEXANDER SKARSGÅRD)
IN *WAR ON EVERYONE*



"I FIGURED THAT OF ALL THE FORMS OF
BULLSHIT-NOSTALGIA AVAILABLE, THIS
WAS THE ONE LEAST LIKELY TO BE
WITHOUT UNSETTLING SURPRISES."

NATHAN ZUCKERMAN (DAVID STRATHAIRN)
IN *AMERICAN PASTORAL*



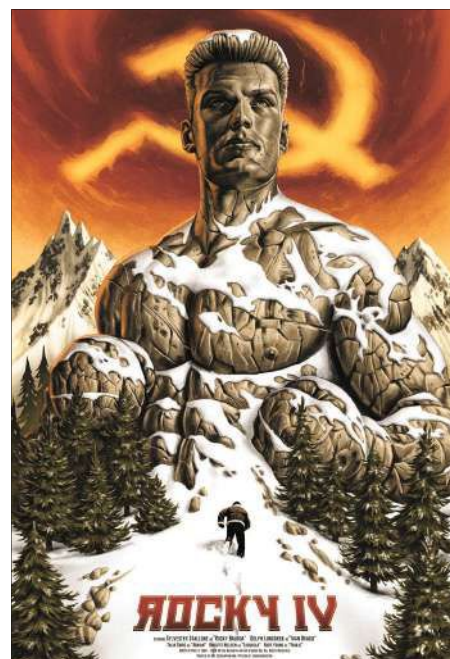
"YOUR RAP SHEET GOT SO MANY HITS,
YOUR RECORD COULD PUT OUT A RECORD."

MISTY KNIGHT (SIMONE MISSICK)
IN *LUKE CAGE*



"HOOTIE TOOTIE DISCO CUTIE!
HOOTIE TOOTIE DISCO CUTIE!"

JANET (ELIZABETH DE RAZZO)
IN *THE GREASY STRANGLER*



POSTER BOY

A new documentary charting the
fall and rebirth of movie poster
art makes for compelling viewing

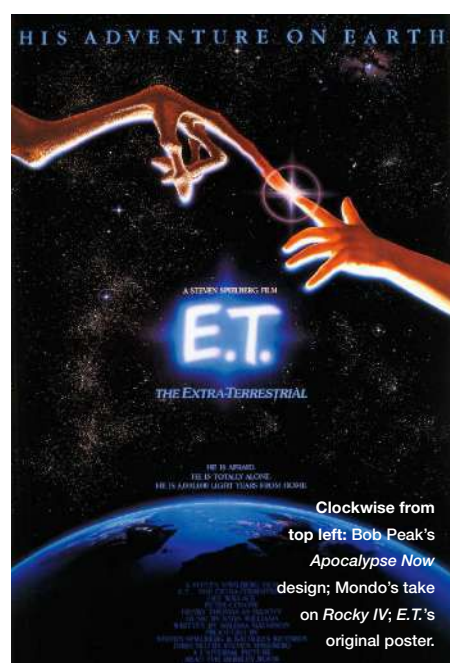
WORDS HELEN O'HARA

THE MOST EXPENSIVE movie poster ever, an international version of the 1929 *Metropolis* promo, sold for \$690,000 in 2005. From the giants of the past — Saul Bass, Drew Struzan, Bob Peak — to the modern stars — Olly Moss, Gary Pullin, Tyler Stout — posters are held in an affection bordering on reverence by film fans. Yet the traditional hand-created poster has all but disappeared from the mainstream in favour of photo compositions — and in his new documentary, *24X36*, Toronto-based filmmaker Kevin Burke set out to discover why.

"They disappeared almost overnight," says Burke. "I've even heard studios say people prefer the floating heads, these image-based posters, because that's what they learn in focus groups. And I think, 'But you've made it that way! You've made this decision, and that's what you gave people.'"

Burke, a commercial video director by day, started thinking about posters six years ago when his now-wife bought him Olly Moss' minimalist *There Will Be Blood* art. It reminded him of the hand-painted film posters he collected as a kid, calling up his local cinema to put in requests and racing down there to collect them as they came off display. Why had all that vintage art disappeared in favour of Photoshopped collages?

"The fact it became a lot easier and cheaper to digitally manipulate images affected it; the studios didn't have to hire someone to make the art for them. That was probably the biggest factor. Then what ends up happening — and we talk about this in the film — is that some people now see an illustrated movie poster and [think] it's selling an animated feature, because for so long we've been treated to the photographic poster. What was once the norm to us has become so



foreign that we're unable to equate it anymore."

Burke hit the road to talk to directors such as Joe Dante as well as designers, collectors and dealers of poster art. But instead of writing an elegy to the movie poster, he found a new dawning, a renaissance of alternative posters led by the likes of Mondo. It was that rebirth that shaped both the film's conclusion and its title. The name refers to the ratio of the modern poster re-imaginings. "There were many, many different sizes through the years. But the film ended up talking a lot about the new wave of posters, so we went with 24x36 because that's the modern size. But believe me, there was a long discussion about that!"

While Burke jokes about a sequel discussing the bonkers Polish posters of the Soviet era, he still hopes his film will prompt studios to consider a return to the bold images of the past. "It's worth making the attempt to find out what movies can be supported by really beautiful painted posters. It used to be about the movies, you know?"

24X36 DOES NOT YET HAVE A UK RELEASE DATE



Anastasia Steele (Dakota Johnson) is having a grey day. Below: Ana and Christian Grey (Jamie Dornan) share knife skills.

GETTING BACK WITH THE EX

The follow-up to *Fifty Shades Of Grey* adds an element of real danger to the Red Room antics

WORDS HELEN O'HARA

ASIDE FROM THE risk of bruising or a groin strain, there was little peril in 2015's *Fifty Shades Of Grey*. But its sequel, *Fifty Shades Darker*, raises the stakes. "The action of the movie opens up," says director James Foley, taking over the reins from Sam Taylor-Johnson, who chose not to return. "It's not a classic *Fatal Attraction* thriller, but it's an interesting hybrid of the ups and downs of a relationship with these plot devices accentuating it."

The plot devices he mentions are "external forces" that threaten the renewed relationship between Jamie Dornan's billionaire Christian Grey and Dakota Johnson's recent graduate Anastasia Steele. "It's the forces that impinge on all relationships and pressure them to fall apart; it's just externalised more. Conflict drives drama, so it's a more dramatic movie."

While the couple bond through bonking, those outsiders gather. Bella Heathcote's Leila is a former submissive-turned-stalker, while Eric Johnson is Ana's lecherous boss, Jack. Ana is also intimidated by Kim Basinger's Elena, the woman who introduced Christian to the BDSM life (a sly twist on the actress's *9½ Weeks* history). "She has glamour that contrasts to Anastasia, so [Ana] could easily be smothered by Kim's character but she kind of fights back,



and it's part of her evolution to become more self-confident."

Meanwhile, Ana and Christian are working out the sexual differences that once drove them apart. "The idea is that there's more of an equivalency between them," says Foley. "She finds herself more adventurous and is actually the initiator of some of the scenes. But within the sex scenes there is someone being dominated and someone really enjoying that. I love that complexity of someone who may have a desire to be treated one way in life but when it's bedroom play, then it's fun and liberating to play different dynamics."

But Foley promises that he's keeping the story focused on its heroine and her life. "I'm interested in psychological realism, and there aren't many films that studios are making that are driven by psychological realism. So this was an opportunity to do drama, on a big scale, with a woman at the centre. It was more adventurous to me, and intriguing." With third instalment *Fifty Shades Freed* already in the can, there's room for things to get yet darker before these love birds fly off to spank happily ever after.

FIFTY SHADES DARKER IS IN CINEMAS FROM 10 FEBRUARY 2017

PRODUCTION NOTES

Movies and TV shows in the works



Jay Roach will write and may direct *Intelligent Life*, about a UN representative who makes first contact with an alien civilisation and falls in love with one of the E.T.s.



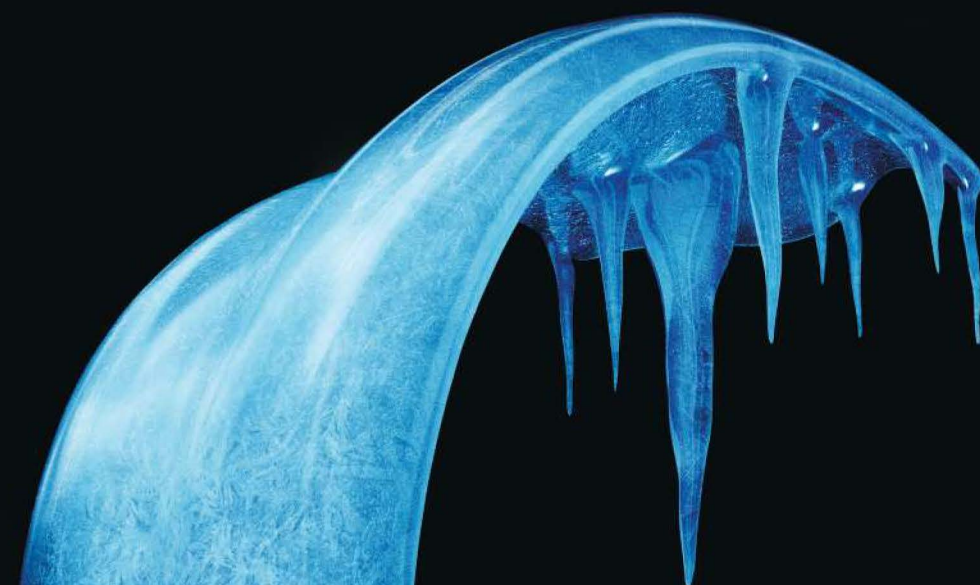
The remake of *Suspiria* has landed Chloë Grace Moretz, who joins Tilda Swinton and Dakota Johnson. The ballet-school horror starts shooting this month in Hungary and Italy.



A new documentary, *Playing The Part*, will focus on the life and work of Sir Ian McKellen, and his progress from RSC luminary to international star.



Emma Thompson will star as a high court judge in the adaptation of Ian McEwan's *The Children's Act*, with Stanley Tucci as her husband and *Dunkirk*'s Fionn Whitehead as a young man in her court.



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OFF THE WALL

Auteur Zhang Yimou's new historical Chinese epic stars Matt Damon. Why?

WORDS OWEN WILLIAMS

DOMINATING THE POSTERS for *The Great Wall*, Zhang Yimou's latest Chinese historical fantasy epic, is the unlikely face of Matt Damon. And behind the scenes is a writing team that includes *Bourne* screenwriter Tony Gilroy, *World War Z* creator Max Brooks and Hollywood writer/director Ed Zwick (who took Tom Cruise to Japan for *The Last Samurai*). Concerns of 'whitewashing' rumbled in opinion pieces and across social media in the wake of the

marketing campaign's earliest salvos, but for the director, the issue isn't one that's especially significant.

"I like how naturalistic his performances are," shrugs the director of his star. "Why not seize the opportunity to work with him?"

The Great Wall's narrative does call for a Western face to be a part of the proceedings — unlike Zhang's all-Chinese films *Hero* or *House Of Flying Daggers*. But the director sees this less as a crowbarred interloper and more an opportunity. Zhang had originally wanted to cast Damon in the Christian Bale role in 2011's *The Flowers Of War* before scheduling clashes prevented that collaboration, and now he has another chance. The story is a culture clash between the individualism and instinct for self-preservation of Damon's mercenary, and

what Zhang sees as the "Eastern group mentality" of Chinese soldiers willing to sacrifice themselves for a greater good. "Matt's perspective and worldview changes: he's moved by the soldiers' dedication," explains the director. "That was important to me, and I wanted to make sure it was understood."

The film's sheer size is one more reason to cast Damon. "A big-budget film like this needed someone like him for a worldwide audience," explains Zhang. "Unfortunately, even the biggest Chinese stars can't break a film out internationally, whereas Matt is famous everywhere."

It's Zhang's involvement that is, in a way, unprecedented in what is largely a Hollywood film. Universal and Legendary are the studios providing the principal finance, but the director



Clockwise from left: Monster magic: will the Great Wall be able to hold back an army of evil dragon-like creatures hellbent on destruction?; Mercenary Matt Damon is armed and ready for battle; Zhang Yimou gives direction to Damon.



creatively views it as “a pure Chinese story that happens to have Western characters”. It isn’t based on an existing folktale, but does feature traditional folk-monsters the Taotie: dragon-like creatures of unrivalled ravenousness that threaten the entire country if the Great Wall cannot hold them back. It’s the sort of terrifying beast that justifies the recruitment of foreigners — a team that also includes characters played by Pedro Pascal and Willem Dafoe, working with the Chinese forces led by Jing Tian, Andy Lau and Zhang Hanyu.

The director finds it incredible that nobody has ever told a story about defending the Great Wall against an army of monsters before. “It took several centuries and a team of Western writers to hit on the concept,” he laughs. “But even though it’s a monster movie, the basics

had to be correct.” Zhang’s involvement began three years ago with the meticulous weeding of the script for cultural inaccuracies. The rise of the Chinese film audience (now the second-largest market in the world) was a major impetus behind the project, but Zhang says that for Legendary “to hire somebody who doesn’t speak English at all to direct an English film is still a pretty big gamble”, especially since *The Great Wall* is officially the biggest film ever made in China. The budget is said to be \$135 million, and since filming on the Great Wall itself is forbidden, large sections had to be reconstructed near the coastal city of Qingdao. Even with CG extensions, this was no small undertaking.

Though he was working with Western stars in a foreign language, Zhang was on home turf and says that he felt perfectly at ease. But this

is not the start of a new career in English-language filmmaking. The process of making a Hollywood film, he says, took twice the time Zhang would normally need, even if he did find the test-screening process valuable in helping the film “play” to audiences from different cultures. And fans of his earlier *wuxia* hits *Hero* and *House Of Flying Daggers* needn’t worry that Hollywood meddling or a Western star has muted the director’s signature look. “We have a scene with Matt on the wall figuring out what colour goes with what regiment. It’s like he’s analysing a Zhang Yimou film!” Zhang laughs. “I’m known for choreographed action and colour. I can’t deviate from that.”

THE GREAT WALL IS IN CINEMAS FROM 24 FEBRUARY 2017



Handmaiden Sook-hee (Kim Tae-ri) gives heiress Hideko (Kim Min-hee) a foot massage. **Below:** Ha Jung-woo plays Count Fujiwara. **Bottom:** Park Chan-wook goes over the script on set.

PARK LIFE

Park Chan-wook is back to his best with *The Handmaiden's* tale of octopuses and revenge

WORDS PHIL DE SEMLYEN

CEPHALOPODAPHILES BE WARNED:

legendary South Korean director Park Chan-wook's new movie, *The Handmaiden*, features another octopus. But unlike its counterpart in the director's *Oldboy*, this one should make it through. "That was a common octopus in *Oldboy*," explains Park, gently schooling *Empire* on molluscs between sips of black coffee. "They're part of the Korean diet. Then there are these big ones, but it's just coincidence you've seen octopuses in two of my films." What's not coincidental is that the director's return to South Korea has seen him again winning rave reviews.

That tentacled critter is just one of the unexpected touches in a period potboiler that bears Park's unmistakable stamp. Few other filmmakers could entwine breathless romance, explicit sex, lurid splashes of violence and twists of pure depravity with such elegance. Like a Fabergé egg filled with opium (the drug is a key story point), it's opulent, intricate and heady in the extreme. "It's a con-artist film and a romance," adds Park, "and I'd add that it's a very humorous

film as well." One scene, in which a group of rich men try to collect themselves after a pornographic reading, even hints at how a Park Chan-wook *Carry On* film might look.

After working with writer Wentworth Miller on his Hitchcockian English-language debut *Stoker*, Park again looked west for his source material. Sarah Waters' Booker Prize-shortlisted novel *Fingersmith*, already adapted into a BBC mini-series, reached him via his producer. A twisting, Byzantine tale about a young female pickpocket planted into the house of an heiress, it had the director trying to guess the outcome as he read. "My predictions were pretty childish," he laughs, "but I hoped these two women would form an alliance and punish the men who mistreated them."

If you've already read *Fingersmith*, fear not: *The Handmaiden* is no idle retread. "The narrative is brilliant, but as a film I felt it could be different," stresses Park. His adaptation shifts the tale from Victorian England to Korea and Japan and a 1930s world of evil uncles, dark secrets and double-crosses. It is, says Park, if not an adjunct to his *Vengeance* trilogy, at least a film in which women can turn the tables on their oppressors. "My previous films feature strong female protagonists, but you can see this as the first where there's a clear feminist statement."

Making bold statements is what Park does, even if, as with *Stoker*, the response can be mixed. That was, he admits, "a difficult journey".



"My level of satisfaction about *Stoker* is very, very high," he says. "Sure, it isn't as high when it comes to the box office, but things don't always go the way you expect when you make films." As *The Handmaiden* proves afresh, Park's films can be slippery suckers to watch too.

THE HANDMAIDEN IS IN CINEMAS FROM 17 FEBRUARY 2017

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ON-SET
EXCLUSIVE

PASSENGERS

OUT DECEMBER 23

STARSHIP VOYAGERS

Jennifer Lawrence and Chris Pratt on a space date

WORDS IAN FREER

CHRIS PRATT IS singing Salt-N-Pepa's *Push It* and popping moves until director Morten Tyldum (*The Imitation Game*) orders him back to work with Jennifer Lawrence. "Usually [actors] come in for three hours a day and get Thursdays off," Pratt laughs. "Here I'm like, 'I have to be here the whole day? In every shot? Fuck *this*.'"

It's day 47 of the Atlanta shoot and *Empire* is playing gooseberry on the first date of writer Aurora (Lawrence) and mechanic Jim (Pratt) while genial bartender Arthur (Michael Sheen) serves drinks. But their Art Deco bar is aboard a spaceship taking 5,000 people in hibernation pods on a one-way, 120-year journey to a new colony, and Arthur is a legless android.

The problem is, Jim and Aurora have awoken 90 years early. The pair will face disasters man-made and natural — Pratt has already shot 'zero-G' wire work that "was cool for about five minutes, then it was the hardest physical work I've ever had to do". But that's not the only reason it's tough for the stars — carrying a whole film is hard.

"I didn't want [another] big movie, so I almost didn't read it," says Lawrence. "I've never wanted to say no to a movie more. But I couldn't stop thinking about it. It's such a beautiful love story."

And the stars' screen chemistry is palpable. So is Lawrence's presence as a creative dynamo, trying different line-readings and gags. "You think you have an idea of who somebody is but she was a monster," deadpans Pratt. "I was expecting she was going to be really cool and funny, and she is all those things and more."

Passengers had its own long journey to the screen. Jon Spaihts (*Doctor Strange*) wrote the spec script in 2007, but it never quite reached production. "It's like a big beautiful house in the Hollywood Hills," explains Pratt. "Everybody wants that house but most people can't afford it so it might be on the market for a while. The small version of this movie would be cool, but it's not going to be even close to what this is going to be because we can do it right. And because we have Jennifer Lawrence."

Clockwise from above: Mechanic Jim (Chris Pratt) does a bit of tinkering; Jim congratulates bartender Arthur (Michael Sheen) on his coffee-making; This was not a good time for Aurora (Jennifer Lawrence) to suffer from claustrophobia; Director Morten Tyldum gives direction to Pratt.



THE DEBATE

ARE PREQUELS EVER A GOOD IDEA?

Amid rumours that George Miller's *Mad Max: Fury Road* sequel is in fact a prequel focused on Charlize Theron's Furiosa, we ask whether that's really the best plan

ILLUSTRATIONS DAVID MAHONEY



YES
OLLY RICHARDS,
CONTRIBUTOR

DISMISSING ENTIRE CATEGORIES of film is getting very boring. Once, sequels were considered lazy and terrible. Then it was remakes. Then it was reboots. Now it's prequels. These complaints go on until enough good examples are made to kill the argument. The popular 'name one sequel better than the original' argument died years ago because there are now far too many. As for reboots, remember when that *Mad Max* reset, without Mel Gibson, seemed a shaky prospect? The only thing that matters with a Furiosa prequel is that it has a compelling story. Any other theoretical gripes are meaningless and childish.

The most common complaint about prequels is that they strip away the mystery.

"I don't need everything to be explained! I don't want to know what's already happened, I want to know what happens next!" This makes little sense. Whether sequel or prequel, you're just filling in more unknowns in a character's life. That's what storytelling is, and if a new story looks backward or forward really makes little difference.

With a prequel, you effectively know 'the end' of the movie, in as much as you know the lead character won't die or will end up in a particular place, but a story is not just its end. Many movies start by telling you the end. We knew Joe Gillis wasn't going to live to the end of *Sunset Boulevard*. Every single biopic is a sequel. It's the journey that matters, and by deciding that a prequel will be automatically bad, we are assuming that our power to imagine a character's backstory is better than its creator's ability to actually tell it.

We know relatively little about Furiosa. We know she was stolen from her original home. We know she has one arm. We know she's a fucking badass. Do we *need* to know if she lost an arm or was born that way? Nope, and who's to say a prequel will answer that? To know more about how she became the warrior she is, if there's

a terrific story to it, doesn't somehow lessen her power in *Fury Road*. If her previous adventures, which do not have to be an origin story in order to qualify as a prequel, are full of surprises and other characters as odd and intriguing, then bring it on. Let us trust that George Miller, the man who created Furiosa, knows a little better than his audience what makes a worthwhile Furiosa story.



NO
HELEN O'HARA,
EDITOR-AT-LARGE

HERE IS A LIST of pure prequels that were as successful as the original, without undermining it: 1) ... That's right. There are none. And that's because prequels don't work. People cite *The Godfather Part II*, but that's half-sequel.





Will a *Furiosa* (Charlize Theron) backstory be a journey too far?

By offering the next chapter alongside the backstory, Francis Ford Coppola sidestepped the great pitfall of the prequel: the fact that the narrative already reached a satisfactory ending. But let's not kid ourselves: that's a sequel with glorified flashbacks.

There are prequels, such as *Fast 5*, *The Good, The Bad And The Ugly* and *Indiana Jones And The Temple Of Doom*, which are technically set before an original film but ignore that fact almost entirely. And what's the point, aside from resurrecting Han Seoul-Oh? If you called those sequels, little or nothing would change — so why not just make a sequel?

Many prequels undermine or confuse the original. In the first category go all the sympathetic backstories for iconic villains: the *Star Wars* prequels, *Hannibal Rising* and *Maleficent* (that's also a sequel). In the second, put the *X-Men* prequels, which trashed the chronology of the original trio out of the canon entirely. *Pan* and *Prometheus* make both mistakes.

What sets prequels apart from sequels, reboots and the rest is that their story's been told. They don't expand our love of the original

because they don't truly expand on its story; there's nothing satisfying in knowing how someone reached their unsatisfactory starting position before their grand adventure. The *Star Wars* prequels led the most beloved and successful films of all time into a decade of fanboy disdain; the best most prequels manage is a quiet agreement to pretend we never saw them.

So the rumours of a *Furiosa*-focused *Fury Road* prequel are worrisome. There was so much power in presenting that character fully formed and unapologetic. Audiences loved her strength, her determination, her lack of compromise, so do they really want to see the inevitable doubt and struggle to reach that point of resolve? If we are thrilled to see her strike back against the monstrous Immortan Joe, do we really want to see her at his mercy?

We can, of course, hope that the rumours are wrong; that Miller is preparing something more innovative (or sequel-y), or that he will produce the first prequel ever to live up to its progenitor. But the odds are against him. However much we trust George Miller, remember that we also trusted George Lucas.



HOW TO MAKE A MONSTER

Writer/director Stacy Title explains her formula for monster *The Bye Bye Man*

WORDS OWEN WILLIAMS

HAVE A STRONG CONCEPT

"Don't say it, don't think it," is the mantra behind her new film, *The Bye Bye Man*, about a supernatural entity who hunts and possesses its victims and makes them killers. "He's telepathic and he knows when you're thinking about him, and your fear makes him more powerful," Title explains.

CAST SMART

Playing the supernatural stalker is Doug Jones, used to monstrous make-up jobs thanks to regular gigs with Guillermo del Toro in *Pan's Labyrinth* and the *Hellboys*. "He can do more with his index finger than most people can do with their entire body," says Title. "He couldn't see well in the make-up, so he would step carefully around the set, then all of a sudden burst into life. There were crew who decided to be elsewhere whenever he was working."

LESS IS MORE

The idea that *The Bye Bye Man* is always approaching was key. "We didn't want to show him too much," Title says, "so there was a lot of concentration on what he looks like as a hooded figure in the distance." Title also opted for a psychological approach over excess gore. "When the Bye Bye Man touches your forehead he can show you the pain he's going to cause: something you're most afraid of," she explains. "It's trippy."

DON'T JUST COPY THE BEST

The pantheon of movie monsters, from Dracula to Freddy Krueger, makes it hard to be original, but Title was clear what she didn't want. "I didn't want him to be quippy or especially violent," she tells *Empire*. What's scary is that he can turn victims into killers. The real horror is in us.

THE BYE BYE MAN IS IN CINEMAS FROM 9 DECEMBER

Will it be a Christmas party too far for Carol (Jennifer Aniston), Tracey (Olivia Munn) Josh (Jason Bateman) and Clay (T.J. Miller)?
Below: Mary (Kate McKinnon) and Josh.

PARTY PLANNERS

Who's who at this year's *Office Christmas Party*?

WORDS OLLY RICHARDS

STAPLING TINSEL TO your nethers. Nude selfies on your boss' phone. Listening to Slade. If you think your workplace shindigs are bad, wait 'til you see *Office Christmas Party*, the latest from Will Speck and Josh Gordon (*Blades Of Glory*). When Clay's struggling business faces closure, the hapless boss throws a giant party to secure a new client and save the branch. The result is the blow-out to end all blow-outs. Speck and Gordon introduce the guests.

CAROL (JENNIFER ANISTON)

Gordon: "Since her father died, Carol has been CEO. There's sibling rivalry between her and [T.J. Miller's] Clay, because she feels she was ignored [by their parents]. Having worked with Jen before [on *The Switch*], she looks for things that are new. She's very brave that way. The idea of playing a villain and not being America's sweetheart was really interesting for her."

CLAY (T.J. MILLER)

Speck: "The company was started by Clay and Carol's father. The original Chicago branch is [now] run by T.J. Miller and his band of misfits. He's mayhem. He got away with everything [as] the beloved child of this imposing figure. But he's a child in the best way, because he cares about the people who work for him. We loved T.J. in *Silicon Valley* so it was great to get him."

JOSH (JASON BATEMAN)

Speck: "Josh is Clay's number two. Clay is the face of the branch; Josh runs it, and doesn't always get the credit he probably deserves. Jason's kind of our muse. He's the perfect centre to any chaotic situation, because he's so understated. As the person at the centre of this storm he was our first choice."

TRACEY (OLIVIA MUNN)

Gordon: "Tracey is this brilliant programmer. The thing about Olivia is obviously she's beautiful, but she has this incredible sense of humour underneath. She

plays this person who has, in the back of her head, the technology that could save this branch. Ultimately through the chaos she has the chance to do that. Olivia threw herself in. She'd query things in the script and be on the phone to someone really high up at, like, Google to check we were right."

MARY (KATE MCKINNON)

Gordon: "Every great party movie needs the person who is attempting to be the adult. That falls to Mary. What we love is that she's very by-the-book and sort of indicative of what's gone wrong in our corporate culture: too many rules and regulations. Yet she's itching to explode. She has one of the biggest and most satisfying arcs."

We got Kate right before she blew up [in *Ghostbusters*], which was fortunate. She can play things really huge, but also very small and emotional, which is a great combination. She's a subversive genius."

OFFICE CHRISTMAS PARTY
IS IN CINEMAS FROM
9 DECEMBER



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ON-SET
EXCLUSIVE

THE WITNESS FOR THE PROSECUTION

AIRS DECEMBER,
BBC ONE

CAN I GET A WITNESS?

Agatha Christie's courtroom thriller gets a fresh makeover...

WORDS OWEN WILLIAMS

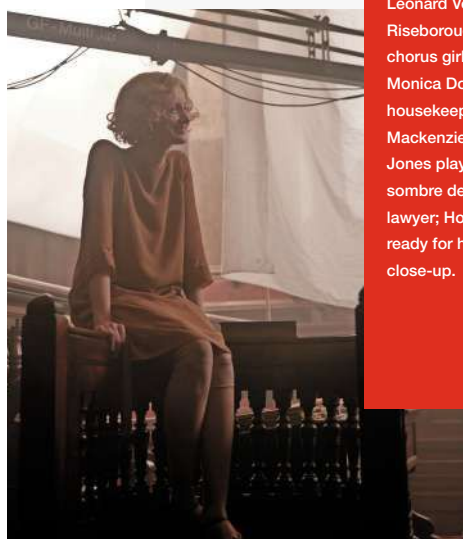
SEX, STRONG LANGUAGE and violence: this is a new age of Agatha Christie adaptations. Following last year's Christmas hit, *And Then There Were None*, it's now the turn of Christie's 1930s courtroom drama *The Witness For The Prosecution* (*Crooked House* and *The ABC Murders* are among a further seven BBC Christie dramas pencilled in for the future). *Empire* is on set in a bare cell, just a desk and two chairs, beneath Manchester's London Road Fire Station — derelict since the '80s — where an interrogation is going on. "You sound like the police," huffs Leonard Vole (Billy Howle) of his defence barrister's questions. "I sound like the prosecution — because that's what they'll ask," says John Mayhew (Toby Jones).

The details he's dragging out of his client concern a relationship with wealthy older woman Emily French, played in flashbacks by Kim Cattrall. Vole inherited French's fortune, and has been accused of her murder. Andrea Riseborough plays Vole's wife Romaine, who — rather surprisingly — testifies against him.

Riseborough and Howle both tell *Empire* they were particularly excited to be working with a screenplay by Sarah Phelps — the writer behind last year's brutal *And Then There Were None*. "People are dying," Phelps says. "In the past there's been a tendency to gloss over those deaths in order to concentrate on the sleuthing. But the bodies *matter*."

Phelps has extrapolated and expanded, unpicking character and post-World War I context from the original short story. "It's a 1930s English noir," she says, in which "the real drama" happens away from the witness stand. And with Phelps deliberately ignoring Christie's own '50s stage adaptation, and the subsequent Billy Wilder film, don't expect a familiar outcome. "You've got all the same story cards," she says. "But you have to shuffle them." The famous twist is now far from the final punchline...

Clockwise from above: Billy Howle in the dock as Leonard Vole; Andrea Riseborough as chorus girl Romaine; Monica Dolan as housekeeper Janet Mackenzie; Toby Jones plays the sombre defence lawyer; Howle is ready for his close-up.

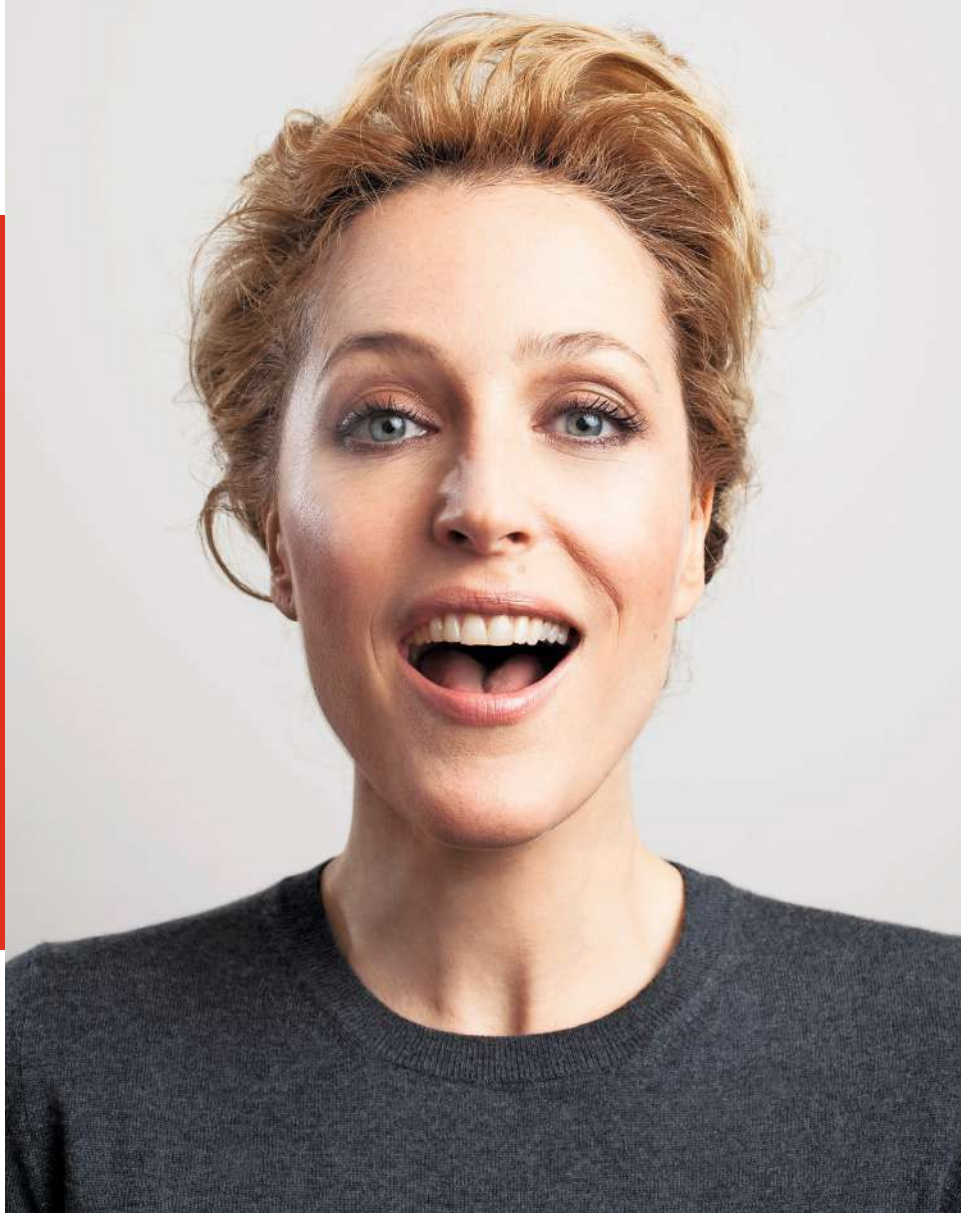


HOW MUCH IS A PINT OF MILK?

GILLIAN ANDERSON

She knows all about aliens and serial killers — but does she know the price of the white stuff?

WORDS JAMES DYER



Do you have a nickname?

My family call me Gill. If anybody else called me Gill, I might slap them, 'cause it's a bit familiar. There's one person in my life who calls me Gigi — that's probably the only nickname I have. I had names at school that people would bully me with that I am not going to repeat. Although why the fuck not? So at one point I was... No, I'm not going say that. Never mind. Let's just stick with Gigi or it'll all go wrong.

Which movie have you seen the most?

I think it's between *The Godfather* and [*The Godfather Part*] II and *The Deer Hunter*.

Have you ever knowingly broken the law?

Yes, and I was arrested. This was in high school, and it was for breaking and entering. So yes, I have broken the law and I'm sure more times than that.

Who is the most famous person you could text?

After *50 Shades*, probably Jamie Dornan, for crying out loud! Other than that, maybe Chris Martin.

What is in your pocket right now?

I've still got my pyjamas on. I don't have any pockets.

Do you have any scars?

There's one just below my right knee. I got that during the London run of *A Streetcar Named Desire*. I knelt on a shard of porcelain plate and it bled all down my leg and into my shoe. I knew that if I looked down I would pass out, so I didn't look down. The show went on and after the fact I was told I probably should have had stitches. There's a scene where I'm tackled by a nurse, and I managed to re-land on the knee with shard still in it! That is a well-earned scar.

What is the one thing you do better than anyone else you know?

Schedule. I am the Queen of the calendar. I can tell you what day of the week October 3 is.

What day of the week is it?

It's a Monday.

When were you most starstruck?

I met Nelson Mandela at [anti-apartheid activist] Walter Sisulu's 80th birthday party in Johannesburg and immediately became a bumbling idiot.

Do you have a signature dish?

I hold regular games nights in London and

I probably rotate the same four or five dishes: coq au vin, beef bourguignon, fish fry, roasted chicken and chilli con carne.

Do you have a favourite joke?

I do. What did the zero say to the eight? Nice belt.

How much is a pint of milk?

I found myself in a Tesco the other day but... I don't know! Whatever I say, it's going to be catastrophically wrong. It's going to say more about me than anything else you could possibly ask. Oh fuck, I'm going to say... 34p!

What is the one thing that scares you?

Public speaking. It really, really does. Even accepting awards or anything like that. The idea of a TED talk... just the thought of that is absolutely terrifying.

When were you last naked outdoors?

Actually I nude-sunbathed last year. It was on the edge of the ocean where there was absolutely nothing but water. At a 180-degree angle. No boats, no paparazzi, just the blue.

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EDITED BY JONATHAN PILE



CINEMA

ARRIVAL



OUT 10 NOVEMBER
CERT 12A / 116 MINS

DIRECTOR Denis Villeneuve
CAST Amy Adams, Jeremy Renner,
Forest Whitaker, Michael Stuhlbarg

PLOT Planet Earth is thrown into chaos when 12 mysterious, extra-terrestrial craft appear around the world. Their inhabitants want to talk, so it's up to linguistics professor Dr Louise Banks (Adams) to try to decipher their mindbending language before global panic turns into inter-species war.

IF YOU NEED a deeply thoughtful and impressive new take on a familiar old genre (and in this era of identikit sequels, we clearly do), then Denis Villeneuve is your man. The French-Canadian director gave the drug-war thriller a violent shake-up with last year's morally murky *Sicario*, and before that he turned the kidnap drama on its head with *Prisoners*. Now we get his take on alien visitation. *Arrival* is Villeneuve's *The Day The Earth Stood Still* or *Close Encounters Of The Third Kind*, and somehow he makes it true to the tropes while also feeling like something new.

It helps that Villeneuve and his creative team have made their extra-solar visitors as truly 'alien' as possible, and thereby ensure this first-contact narrative is inventively, fiendishly and (you'd imagine) realistically problematic. The alien craft, or "shells", are immense, lens-shaped, black-rocky obelisks which levitate noiselessly several metres above the Earth's surface, never actually touching terra firma. Every 18 hours a hatch opens in the shell's lower tip, admitting a delegation of Homo sapiens into the gravity-bending interior. The human visitors, carrying an achingly symbolic canary in a cage, arrive at a rectangular audience chamber in which they're separated from a sea of ominous white mist by a transparent wall. And from the swirling space-fog they emerge: the eerie, graceful "heptapods", resembling a hybrid of squid, spider, whale and mangrove. The tips of their gnarled, finger-like limbs, it transpires, peel open into starfish-like appendages which ejaculate ink that flows into lazily floating, coffee-mug-stain symbols. This is the aliens' language. It's way beyond "klaatu barada nikto" — or even *Close Encounters*' five-note salutation.

They have something to say, and the race to figure out what it is gives the film both its tight

structure and pulsing momentum. Without a single planetary leader to be taken to on our divided world, the heptapods have suspended themselves over a dozen points around its surface. But why 12, exactly? And why those specific locations? The mysteries layer up, though despite all the heavy portent, Eric Heisserer's script isn't without levity — at one point physicist Ian Donnelly (Renner) correlates that all the arrival sites are in places where Sheena Easton had a hit in 1980. Perhaps they're just inter-galactic fans of 9 To 5's perky pop stylings.

While the Chinese and Russians get stropy and sabre-rattley, the Americans put linguist Dr Louise Banks (Adams) on the case. Like all good movie eggheads, she's both intensely brainy and able to distil her science down into digestible soundbites for the sceptical military-types, represented by Whitaker's weary Colonel and Stuhlbarg's CIA prick. She also comes with some outsize emotional baggage, connected with the death of a loved one.

But before you roll your eyes over the cliché of the grieving hero, be reassured this particular emotional thread is ingeniously connected with the macro-trauma playing out around her. Also, in finding an actress to sell it convincingly, Villeneuve could have done no better than Adams, who negotiates and balances Louise's frustrations with the army wonks, her bewilderment/awe at meeting E.T.s, and her personal tribulations with subtlety and absorbing naturalism.

On the exterior, Louise is the calm, albeit shaky, eye of this interplanetary storm. On the interior rages a silent storm of her own, a fugue of memory fragments that comes to twist and bend like a psychic cyclone as she begins to decode the visitors' inky vernacular. Adams is the film's quiet, luminous heart, and Villeneuve spends more time focusing on her face than he does the aliens or their mysterious vessels; we're not even allowed to see the first shell properly until Louise herself witnesses it, and quite right, too.

Arrival is a beautifully polished puzzle box of a story whose emotional and cerebral heft should enable it to withstand nit-picky scrutiny. And like all the best sci-fi, it has something pertinent to say about today's world; particularly about the importance of communication, and how we need to transcend cultural divides and misconceptions if we're to survive as a species. An ideal that shouldn't need any translation. **DAN JOLIN**

VERDICT The Earth may be standing still again, but *Arrival* is a fresh take on the cosmic-encounter movie that grips you with the strength of its ideas and the quality of its execution, then burrows deep thanks to its resonant themes and emotional richness.



Deliveroo were taking their time.

CINEMA

AMERICAN PASTORAL



OUT 11 NOVEMBER
CERT TBC / 126 MINS

DIRECTOR Ewan McGregor

CAST Ewan McGregor, Jennifer Connelly, Dakota Fanning, David Strathairn

PLOT In post-war New Jersey, Seymour 'The Swede' Levov (McGregor) seems to have it all: a glittering sporting high-school record, a prosperous business, a beauty queen wife. But when his daughter gets involved in the violent politics of the 1960s, a seemingly perfect all-American family quickly crumbles.

EWAN MCGREGOR, THE actor, has frequently found himself drawn to challenging material — the heroin addiction of *Trainspotting*, the nourish bleakness of *Young Adam*, the sex and drugs of *Velvet Goldmine*. *American Pastoral*, therefore, certainly fits the bill for Ewan McGregor, the director. But a Pulitzer Prize-winning Philip Roth novel, juggling multiple hefty themes across several narrators of varying

reliability, is an ambitious task that would stretch even a seasoned director, let alone a first-timer. Alas, so it proves.

John Romano's script, which has to turn a deeply internal book into a largely external movie, streamlines Roth's disorderly timelines into a single narrative, bookended by scenes set in the present. It's here that we meet Roth surrogate Nathan Zuckerman (Strathairn), who learns his old friend, 'The Swede' (McGregor), has died.

This kick-starts Zuckerman reflecting on the life of The Swede, once the chiselled star of his high school — the prom king, an ace quarterback, and the paragon of a small Jewish community hoping to remedy the horror stories of the Holocaust by turning to a fair-skinned Jewish-American alpha male. "Our hero," he calls him. "Our Kennedy."

Post high school we learn the Swede enjoyed a bucolic life in rural New Jersey with his Gentile wife (Connelly) and his daughter, Merry (Fanning). When we first meet Merry, she is the apple of her father's eye, the nucleus of their nuclear family. But cracks in this perfect life soon emerge. Merry suffers from a debilitating stutter and, as a teenager, develops a rebellious streak, encouraged by the 1960s' turbulent politics. At 16, angry and radicalised, she commits a horrific act of terrorism — the American Dream is over.

In the novel, The Swede grapples with his neutral politics as his family (and his country) respond with extremism. Reduced to the running time of a film and the speech of the characters, *American Pastoral* becomes one father's melodramatic quest to find his estranged daughter. The book has lofty things to say about a country in turmoil; the film has muddled things to say about a man whose life didn't pan out as he'd hoped.

But that's not the only thing that hasn't translated well. Roth's dialogue, so droll and deft on page, sounds broad and stogy on screen. "This... is America!" announces The Swede at one point, but fails to muster the authority the moment requires.

It's a shame, because the intent is genuine and wholehearted. This is a passion project for McGregor, and he brings a gentle incorruptibility to his performance. The period attention-to-detail is sharp, too, but resorts to obvious clichés: setting the scene with archive footage of Woodstock and the moon landing is as subtle as a tank in a model village. To borrow Roth's coinage, it could all do with being a little more untanklike. **JOHN NUGENT**

VERDICT It's hard to begrudge such an earnest endeavour, but this is missing the wit, nuance, and insight of a book thought by many — correctly, maybe — to be unadaptable.



100 STREETS

★★★

OUT 11 NOVEMBER / CERT 15 / 93 MINS

DIRECTOR Jim O'Hanlon

CAST Gemma Arterton, Idris Elba, Franz Drameh, Charlie Creed-Miles

THIS INNER-CITY triptych follows the lives of a small cluster of Londoners, all dwelling within a square mile of the capital. A washed-up rugby star (Elba), his estranged wife (Arterton), a crooning cabbie (Creed-Miles) and a reluctant drug dealer (Drameh) make up the principal players, their tangled stories crossing paths with far less contrivance than the set-up might suggest. The three entwined narratives cover alcoholism, manslaughter, infidelity and petty crime, none of which have meat enough to satisfy alone but together form a varied backdrop to showcase some very respectable character work. This is especially true for Drameh, the standout here, bringing a wounded humanity to his street thug with a heart of gold. **JD**



THE WAILING

★★★★

OUT 25 NOVEMBER / CERT TBC / 156 MINS

DIRECTOR Na Hong-jin

CAST Do Won Kwak, Jun Kunimura, Chun Woo-hee

AFTER HIS STUNNINGLY assured debut *The Chaser*, and grim, gripping crime thriller *The Yellow Sea*, South Korean writer-director Na turns to horror with this ambitious, deceptively effective blend of police procedural, visceral horror, pitch-black comedy and socio-theological allegory. When a mysterious sickness causes a spate of brutal murders in a sleepy Seoul suburb, the media blames poisonous mushrooms. But detective Jong-Goo (Kwak), whose young daughter appears afflicted, has cause to suspect an elderly stranger (Kunimura) recently arrived from Japan. *The Wailing* takes its time to burrow under your skin, but will leave you with a lingering sense of dread Hollywood can rarely muster. **DH**



CINEMA

DOG EAT DOG

★★★

OUT 11 NOVEMBER

CERT 18 / 93 MINS

DIRECTOR Paul Schrader

CAST Nicolas Cage, Willem Dafoe, Christopher Matthew Cook

PLOT A trio of ex-cons (Cage, Cook, Dafoe) reunite to hatch a plan that will make them all some serious money so they can retire. It involves kidnapping a baby. There will be complications. And blood.

YOU MIGHT THINK — might hope — that the man who wrote *Taxi Driver* and *Raging Bull* (and directed, amongst others, *American Gigolo*) would be okay for work for the rest of his days. But that hasn't been the case for Paul Schrader. Since his *Exorcist* prequel was shelved then reshot by Renny Harlin 13 years ago he's struggled, with this decade being particularly unkind to him. In 2013, there was *The Canyons*: the notoriously troubled Lindsay Lohan-starring LA noir funded via Kickstarter that was panned by critics. Then two years ago it got even worse. *Dying Of The Light*, which he wrote, initially had Nicolas Winding Refn and Harrison Ford attached (the former leaving to make *Drive*). Schrader ended up directing it himself, but the studio reedited his cut into incoherence and he had another critical and commercial catastrophe on his hands.

So there's a lot riding on his latest, which reunites him with loyal collaborator Willem Dafoe (appearing in his seventh Schrader film) and *Dying Of The Light*'s star Nicolas Cage. Dafoe's *Mad Dog* sets the gruesome, ugly tone in the very first scene: slitting his girl's throat and then shooting her daughter in the head, all to a jaunty soundtrack of "woo-hoo/woo-hoo-hoos". These "woo-hoo/woo-hoo-hoos", of course, will be familiar from *Kill Bill: Vol. 1* — even though it's the 1958 Rock-A-Teens

original here — and are far from *Dog Eat Dog*'s only blatant whiff of Tarantino. The film is even based on the novel by reformed armed robber Edward Bunker, better known as *Reservoir Dogs*' Mr Blue.

His unhinged, psychotic personality established, *Mad Dog* sniffs a bump of heroin, packs up a suitcase full of guns, says the N-word and heads off to meet just-got-out prison buddies Troy (Cage) and Diesel (Cook). Not surprisingly, their reunion takes place in an ultra-sleazy small-town strip club, and ends in a brawl. Even less surprisingly, the trio conclude that going straight is not for them, so set about embarking on a fairly simple-seeming "last job" — kidnapping the baby of a crime lord's rival — that will set them all up for life. All their plan really sets up, though, is an hour of the sort of bad-guys-doing-bad-things routine that often feels very two decades ago and thus not shocking in the slightest. There are unnecessary extra murders down solely to psychotic temperaments. There are bodies hurriedly disposed of. There are sadistic cops. There are arguments in the back of stolen cars as to what to do on stakeouts, and lots of dialogue littered with clumsy-rather-than-clever contemporary references (Beyoncé and Taylor Swift get mentioned, as do "those Wall Street guys").

But somehow it still works. Cage is more dialled back than usual, but is all the better for it: every glance conveying the desperation of a man who doesn't want to be doing what he's doing, but knows nothing else. And with some energetic switches from black-and-white to dimly lit rooms to lurid colour (particularly in the case of Cage's turquoise suit), *Dog Eat Dog* ends up being highly watchable and more than the sum of its deeply familiar parts. It's no masterpiece. But it should be enough to get Schrader back in the conversation. **HAMISH MACBAIN**

VERDICT Hackneyed and somewhat dated Tarantino-isms abound. But for the committed fan of such things, there is more than enough to enjoy here: not least an entertainingly unhinged performance from Willem Dafoe.



CINEMA

TRAIN TO BUSAN

★★★★★

OUT 28 OCTOBER
CERT 15 / 118 MINS

DIRECTOR Yeon Sang-ho

CAST Gong Yoo, Ma Dong-seok, Jung Yu-mi, Ahn So-hee, Kim Eui-Sung

PLOT Banker Seok Woo (Gong) agrees to take his daughter (Ahn) to visit her mother in Busan. But a zombie epidemic breaks out as they leave Seoul, and the passengers on the train find themselves under threat from a horde of the undead.

TERRORISTS IN A skyscraper, alien in a spaceship, snakes on a plane: the mix of dangerous antagonists and enclosed space is a perennial favourite of filmmakers, for obvious reasons, and the combinations are formed and reformed in an endless kaleidoscope. Now South Korean director Yeon Sang-ho has put zombies on a train, and it's a match made in heaven — or somewhere much lower down.

The zombie/train combo has actually been done before, notably in 1972's *Horror Express*, but *Train To Busan* is considerably more propulsive and less narratively cluttered. This train and its passengers are joltingly familiar: there are businessmen, a young couple, two old ladies gossiping, a school baseball team en route to a game. They've boarded a modern intercity, with its sliding glass entries, flimsy toilet doors and notable lack of zombie-proofing. It could be the 11:08 to Peterborough.

Our hero, Seok Woo (Gong), and his daughter Su-an (Ahn) are en route to visit her mother, his ex-wife. But the last person to race through the train doors isn't just running late, and the hands banging on the window don't belong to a sweetheart waving farewell. With devastating speed, infection spreads through the carriages. A few survivors barricade themselves into what becomes a relative safe haven, but eventually the track will have to end, and it's not

clear that there'll be any refuge beyond the train's doors.

Gong's Seok-Woo emerges as a resourceful, determined lead, growing from a disengaged workaholic (whose company may have invested in the facility responsible for the outbreak) willing to sacrifice others to protect himself into a more recognisable hero. The characters around him are well-developed stock figures, but some neat storytelling twists mean you can't always see who will go first, or how, or why — and the really hiss-able villain, as is traditional in these situations, is a ratfink traitor in their midst.

Crucially, Yeon has come up with a take on zombies that is rooted deep in the genre but still feels innovative. Like Romero's undead, these are an inescapable evil spreading across the world to offer a sly commentary on our modern society. Like the 'infected' in Danny Boyle's *28 Days Later*, they're fast and strong. And like the swarming hordes of *World War Z*, there's something insect-like about their ravenous pursuit of these few uninfected hold-outs; they force their way through walls and doors with the sheer weight of their numbers and fall from great heights to continue their pursuit on broken limbs. But Yeon has his own twists, too. These figures are contorted and unnatural, closer to something from *The Exorcist* or *Ring* than zombies we've seen before, and they're driven by sight rather than smell or hearing — a fact the survivors exploit to great effect.

Yeon establishes himself as a gifted action director: one mid-journey stop at an apparently deserted station turns into a terrifying set-piece that's among the year's best. But it's a slow struggle through carriages full of infected people to reach a stranded loved one that really stands out; imagine *The Raid*, but horizontal, or *The Host* away from the river.

In the end, Yeon goes back to the human story and delivers a surprisingly emotional climax. It may seem like a shift of tone, but maybe family ties were the point all along. **HELEN O'HARA**

VERDICT One of the best horrors of the year: innovative, effective and more terrifying than a rail replacement bus service.



STARFISH

★★★★★

OUT 28 OCTOBER / CERT 15 / 94 MINS

DIRECTOR Bill Clark

CAST Joanne Froggatt, Tom Riley, Ellie Copping, Michele Dotrice

RELATING THE EFFORTS of Rutland children's author Tom Ray to overcome a bout of sepsis in 2000 that left him a facially scarred double amputee, this biopic avoids the melodramatics and sentimentality that blights most 'disease of the week' movies. Instead, it chronicles the family's struggle to cope with Ray's physical and psychological trauma with laudable restraint. The scripting is patchy, with one politicised pitch feeling particularly awkward, but poignant moments abound — and they hit hard because of the natural playing of Froggatt (as his wife) and Riley, whose performance is enhanced by some excellent prosthetics and Ray courageously appearing as a body double. **DP**



THE COMEDIAN'S GUIDE TO SURVIVAL

★

OUT 31 OCTOBER / CERT 15 / 91 MINS

DIRECTOR Mark Murphy

CAST James Buckley, Paul Kaye, MyAnna Buring

BASED ON THE real life of journalist-turned-comic James Mullinger, this low-budget British comedy takes a fertile premise — the daily humiliations of life as a failing stand-up — and somehow turns it into 90 minutes of painfully unfunny flailing. The slender plot concerns Mullinger (Buckley) using an assignment from his sadistic boss (Kaye, firmly in second gear) to glean second-career advice from a range of successful real-life comedians. It's muddled, overly reliant on gross-out clichés and the cameos — which include Omid Djalili playing himself and Kevin Eldon as a blabbermouth American driver — seem to be the product of either ill-advised benevolence or a series of lost wagers. **JF**

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CINEMA

NOCTURNAL ANIMALS

★★★★

OUT 4 NOVEMBER
CERT 15 / 117 MINS**DIRECTOR** Tom Ford**CAST** Amy Adams, Jake Gyllenhaal, Michael Shannon, Aaron Taylor-Johnson, Isla Fisher, Ellie Bamber, Armie Hammer**PLOT** Susan (Adams) is materially successful but emotionally unfilled. When she's sent a manuscript by her ex (Gyllenhaal), telling a tale of vengeance in the Texas desert, she reminisces on her former life and confronts the mistakes she's made.

WHEN A FASHION designer turns to filmmaking, it seems the least we should expect is for it to look the part. And so it's proved with Tom Ford. His debut feature, *A Single Man*, managed to find beauty in the bottom of a sock drawer, and this, his second, which he adapted from Austin Wright's novel *Tony & Susan*, looks similarly exquisite. The man is an artist, undoubtedly.

As it happens, so too is his film's central character, Susan (Adams), though she has shelved her creative impulse to manage an LA gallery. The film opens with her latest exhibit — a celebration of obese, wobbling, naked flesh. It is unsightly content strikingly displayed. We come to realise that art mirrors life for Susan, whose outwardly beautiful existence is actually rather ugly, comprising a joyless marriage to a philandering husband (Hammer), a job she no longer likes — she despairs of the junk culture that pervades her world — and a self-fabricated, soul-crushing guilt.

That guilt pertains to her first husband, Edward (Gyllenhaal), a writer whom she deserted in a cruel manner two decades earlier. He was too weak. She wanted someone stronger. But Edward has now finished his debut novel, which he dedicates to Susan and to whom he sends a proof. As she reads his manuscript — a pulp Texas tale of violence received and reciprocated — she sees the obvious parallels between the 'fiction' and her actions, her emotions get a kicking and Edward, as a consequence, gets his much-belated revenge. Talk about a dish served cold.

The novel's plot also plays out on screen as she reads — Gyllenhaal taking a dual role by also

playing Tony, the book's protagonist (authors write about themselves, we're told). Ford's transitions in and out of this fictional narrative — and back and forth between Susan's current life, and the one she once shared with Edward — are wonderfully adept, all the strands wrapping neatly around the body of his thesis like a well-tailored suit.

The cast is impressive and there are delightfully mischievous single-scene turns from Laura Linney, Michael Sheen and Andrea Riseborough. Some might find the film heartless or cold, but that misses the point. Strong storytelling demands empathy not sympathy and, like Susan, we've all made bad choices. So what if her lonely fate doesn't bring a tear to the eye? Maybe it's not meant to. Like the art that Susan peddles, this is a piece of junk culture with an unapologetic pulp filling, masterfully formed by Ford and expertly framed by cinematographer Seamus McGarvey. Sit back and enjoy the ride. **WILL LAWRENCE**

VERDICT Ford's artfully composed and emotionally clever noir is well-paced and, in stark contrast to the naked flesh that opens the film, never, ever sags.



LO AND BEHOLD: REVERIES OF THE CONNECTED WORLD

★★★

OUT **OCTOBER 28** / CERT **12A** / **98 MINS**

DIRECTOR Werner Herzog

CAST Lawrence Krauss, Elon Musk

WERNER HERZOG HAS always been fascinated by humanity's troublesome relationship with nature. But here, in his latest documentary, he changes things up to direct his attention towards our species' place within a very different kind of landscape: the internet, during "one of the biggest revolutions we as humans are experiencing". It is indeed big. Too big, in fact, for a 98-minute film. Herzog nimbly darts around this whopper of a topic, but it's less a complete picture than a thoughtfully assembled montage of snapshots, raising more interesting questions ("Can the internet be imaginative?") than it provides satisfying answers. A lesser Werner, but still worth dipping your brain into. **DJ**



GIMME DANGER

★★★

OUT **18 NOVEMBER** / CERT **TBC** / **108 MINS**

DIRECTOR Jim Jarmusch

CAST Iggy Pop, Ron Asheton, Scott Asheton, James Williamson

ONE OF THE most influential American rock bands of all time, The Stooges have long deserved a definitive biopic: and there could not have been anyone better qualified to make it than director Jim Jarmusch (who cast Iggy Pop in both *Coffee & Cigarettes* and *Dead Man*). A scantness of glory (or gory) days footage does hamper his film, and the increasingly common music documentary trick of using animated sequences to fill gaps — see *Montage Of Heck* or, more recently, *Supersonic* — is overused. But the genial raconteuring of Iggy saves the day, with anecdotes that begin with lines like, "I went to Detroit with a tab of mescaline and a shovel," impossible to resist. **HM**



CINEMA

AFTER LOVE

★★★★★

OUT **OCTOBER 28**

CERT **12A** / **101 MINS**

DIRECTOR Joachim Lafosse

CAST Bérénice Bejo, Cédric Kahn, Marthe Keller, Catherine Salée

PLOT Boris (Kahn) and Marie (Bejo) are separating after 15 years of marriage — however, cash-strapped Boris is unable to move out of the family home, and disputes arise over how best to divide the couple's assets.

THERE'S A LONG and unproud history of non-English language titles being reworked into boring mush for the British market — and *After Love* is just the latest. *L'Economie Du Couple*, its French title, is far more apposite, but in fairness you can imagine how the distributors struggled to see a marketing strategy for something called *The Political Economy Of Contemporary Divorce*, even if it would tell audiences far more specifically what they're getting.

The other, better-trodden tradition this falls into is the drama of marital collapse. What can this offer, if not the pioneering spirit of *Faces*, the cultural critique of *A Separation*, the panoramic sweep of *Scenes From A Marriage*, or the sheer brutality of *Blue Valentine*?

The clue's in the original title — there's an unusual focus on the couple's relative levels of wealth, which is refreshingly frank, given how most people in this painfully bourgeois genre seem not to have jobs to go to. Boris (Kahn) is a builder with aspirations to be an architect and not a bean to his name, while Marie (Bejo) comes from the kind of family where her dad can blithely offer an interest-free loan of €140,000. They are separated but living under the same roof until their (very nice) flat can be sold — problem is, Boris feels he's entitled to half its value as he was the one who put the work into making it so nice, while Marie merely footed the bill.

The idea of using a divorce to explore Marx's concept of *Kapitalverwertung* — that's the addition of value to an asset through labour — is committed to both in text and subtext. There are subtle echoes of it in the constant negotiations and power games over everything from access to the couple's twin daughters to games of *Uno*, and it's sledge-hammered home in a brutal scene where the couple lay out their wildly diverging financial situations. There's next to no backstory, the function of this kind of narrative to provoke uncomfortable echoes of the audience's real-life romantic catastrophes — a painful wound to pick in pretty much anyone old enough to see this.

That said, nobody sits down with a pizza and a glug of Jacob's Creek to enjoy an exploration of rentier capitalism's effect on interpersonal relationships. It's lucky, then, that director Lafosse reins in his tougher instincts (his past films have looked at child murder and sexual exploitation, and can make Bruno Dumont feel like Mel Brooks) to deliver subtle observation after subtle observation — a dispute over some football boots conveys a huge amount in a tiny amount of time, for example. He's well-served by Jean-François Hensgens' fluid camerawork and skilful lighting, which ensure the single-flat setting never gets dull, and by Kahn and Bejo, who both negotiate the 'Little Miss Perfect' and 'Prole With A Goal' elephant traps their performances could have fallen into.

Crucially, their chemistry conveys that there was once love in this fractured union, and they're not afraid of embracing the dark comedy break-ups can bring. A dinner party Boris crashes, demanding cake and accusing his friends of siding with his ex, functions both as a centrepiece and as an encapsulation of what *After Love* excels at — capturing the big picture of what dissolving a marriage actually means, and displaying flawed, vulnerable characters muddling through one of life's great tortures. Pass the Jacob's Creek. **ANDREW LOWRY**

VERDICT Unapologetically aimed at the arthouse crowd, this is superior filmmaking. Superbly acted and well written, it stakes its claim in the pantheon of love-gone-wrong watches.



CINEMA

YOUR NAME



OUT 24 NOVEMBER
CERT 12A / 106 MINS

DIRECTOR Makoto Shinkai

CAST (VOICES) Ryûnosuke Kamiki, Mone Kamishiraishi, Masami Nagasawa

PLOT A small-town high-school girl named Mitsuha (Kamishiraishi) and a Tokyo boy of the same age named Taki (Kamiki) inexplicably start possessing each other's bodies in randomly occurring day-long bouts. From there, a strange relationship develops.

MAKOTO SHINKAI. GET used to that name. Within the next few years, if there is any justice in this crazy universe, it will be as synonymous with culturally transcendent Japanese animation as Hayao Miyazaki is right now. And there's a good chance he will also be holding an Oscar early next year. Either for Best Animated Feature, or Best Foreign Language Film. Or why not even both?

Shinkai's been making movies since 2004, such as 2011's fantasy-tinged adventure romance *Children Who Chase Lost Voices*, but his fifth, *Your Name*, has proven a true breakthrough for the 43-year-old former graphic designer. At the time of writing, his gender-switching meta-romance is on its sixth consecutive week at the top of the Japanese box office and has earned north of 13 billion yen (\$126 million), a level of success for an animator only previously enjoyed by, yes, Hayao Miyazaki. And it's not just us making comparisons — his country folk have already started proclaiming him 'the new Miyazaki'.

With good reason. Just like the now-retired head of Studio Ghibli, Shinkai exhibits a preternatural attention to detail; every frame of *Your Name* is a richly teeming composition, whether breathing in the vast sweep of a lush, crater-scarred landscape, tracing the aurora-tailed path of a sky-slicing comet, or focusing on the weaving of threads as they are nimbly

braided into colourful cords. Whether blazing with sunlight, or shadowed by storm clouds, the film glows with an inner life that the hard, plastic sheen of CG animation so rarely attains; one awesomely trippy-cosmic sequence is even realised using pastels and chalks.

And playing out in front of all this delicate artistry is... a J-pop-soundtracked body-swap comedy? For teenagers? Don't worry, we're not getting just another *Freaky Friday*. Or *The Hot Chick*. There may be a lightness to the film's early body-switch scenes, with a running gag about teen boy Taki (Kamiki) fondling 'his' breasts whenever he wakes up as Mitsuha (Kamishiraishi), but the comedy of biological displacement quickly evolves into an odd kind of long-distance love story, with Taki and Mitsuha leaving each other messages via journals and smartphone diary apps, while also charmingly setting each other rules about what they can do while in each other's bodies. There's a unique tension to their relationship. In one sense they are closer to each other than would normally ever be possible, literally sharing lives, yet in another they couldn't be more separate. No doubt there's a metaphor here for the simultaneous joys and horrors of adolescence.

The mystery of their predicament is found less in the reason it's happening than the revelation of its purpose. There is a bigger story here, one that is fed by Japanese culture's understandable preoccupation with mass destruction, and *Your Name* makes an astonishing midpoint swerve in direction, almost switching sub-genres. To say more would be to deny you the joy of discovering the film's secrets. So we won't.

Shinkai's brazen narrative boldness, his dextrous handling of alternating, equally likeable lead characters, and his mastery of hand-drawn visuals all weave together to form a profoundly gorgeous cinematic experience. If any film has the right to be called this decade's *Spirited Away*, it's this one. **DAN JOLIN**

VERDICT Part body-swap comedy, part long-distance romance, part... something else. If you only see one Japanese animated feature this year, see this one, and see it more than once.



I, OLGA HEPNAROVÁ



OUT 18 NOVEMBER / CERT TBC / 104 MINS
DIRECTORS Tomáš Weinreb, Petr Kazda
CAST Michalina Olszanska, Martin Pečlát

METICULOUSLY RECREATING THE oppressive atmosphere of Prague in the early 1970s, this austere monochrome account of the life and crime of the last woman to be executed in Czechoslovakia has been billed an 'existentialist drama'. But, while avoiding judgement and speculation in exploring why a 22-year-old lesbian loner would drive a truck into a tram queue, debut directors Weinreb and Kazda employ a series of measured vignettes to convey her growing sense of alienation and bitterness after enduring domestic abuse, physical violence and romantic rejection. Although somewhat mannered, Polish actress Michalina Olszanska leaves an indelible impression as the tortured soul whose seething composure cracks in sight of the gallows. **DP**



ATTACK OF THE LEDERHOSEN ZOMBIE



OUT 28 OCTOBER / CERT 15 / 77 MINS
DIRECTOR Dominik Hartl
CAST Laurie Calvert, Gabriela Marcinková, Oscar Dyekjaer Giese, Margarete Tiesel

NOVELTY IS BECOMING a rare commodity in the zom-com sub-genre, but Austrian Dominik Hartl comes up with some innovative ways to slay the walking dead in this tale of snowboarders and a batch of toxic fake snow. The set-up is perfunctory and predictable (with lots of key plot points left unexplained), while the performances are more bullish than accomplished. But the make-up effects and animatronics belie the modest budget, as gore and innards are splattered about with the aid of some snowboards, ski poles and a snowblower. Still, it's not all knowing horror, a romantic dance routine involving some music-soothed zombies providing welcome and touching moments of calm amid the madness. **DP**

BENEDICT
CUMBERBATCH

CHIWETEL
EJIOFOR

RACHEL
McADAMS

BENEDICT
WONG

MADS
WITH MIKKELSEN

TILDA
AND SWINTON

MARVEL STUDIOS
**DOCTOR
STRANGE**

THE IMPOSSIBILITIES ARE ENDLESS.

MARVEL STUDIOS PRESENTS A SCOTT DERRICKSON FILM BENEDICT CUMBERBATCH CHIWETEL EJIOFOR RACHEL McADAMS BENEDICT WONG MICHAEL SHIBUSABE BENJAMIN BRATT SCOTT ADKINS WITH MADS MIKKELSEN AND TILDA SWINTON
BY SARAH HALLEY FENN, CSA
SCREENPLAY BY DAVID J. CRONIN
DIRECTED BY SCOTT DERRICKSON
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS MICHAEL B. URBAN
PRODUCED BY VICTORIA ALONSO STEPHEN BROUSSARD
EDITED BY KEVIN FERGUSON
COSTUME DESIGNER ALEX BYRNE
HAIR AND MAKEUP BY WYATT SMITH
PRODUCTION DESIGNER SAGRINA PUSCO
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS JON SCHWARTZ AND SCOTT DERRICKSON
PRODUCED BY C. ROBERT CARROLL
WRITTEN BY SCOTT DERRICKSON
CASTING BY JON SCHWARTZ
COSTUME DESIGNER ALEX BYRNE
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EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS JON SCHWARTZ AND SCOTT DERRICKSON
PRODUCED BY C. ROBERT CARROLL
WRITTEN BY SCOTT DERRICKSON
CASTING BY JON SCHWARTZ

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Dad's nasal hair was getting out of hand.

CINEMA

THE LIGHT BETWEEN OCEANS



OUT 1 NOVEMBER
CERT 12A / 133 MINS

DIRECTOR Derek Cianfrance

CAST Alicia Vikander, Michael Fassbender, Rachel Weisz, Caren Pistorius, Emily Barclay

PLOT World War I veteran Tom (Fassbender) takes a job as a lighthouse keeper, and is joined by his wife Isabel (Vikander). The pair long for a child and when a baby washes up in a boat, they decide to raise her — but are faced with an agonising dilemma when they discover her true heritage.

PERHAPS SURPRISINGLY GIVEN he made *Blue Valentine*, the latest drama from Derek Cianfrance is an unashamedly romantic affair. Set at the end of World War I, it stars Michael Fassbender and Alicia Vikander as a couple beginning their life together off the coast of Western Australia. Pairing those two actors together is undeniably smart casting — they're

a terrific team and the film's greatest strength.

Vikander puts in an absorbing performance as Isabel, the sparky small-town girl who spies an escape when the handsome new lighthouse keeper is invited to tea — and wastes no time trying to prize him out of his shell. He's buttoned-up, resistant, still nursing psychological war wounds, but her persistence pays off. It can't hurt that she's clearly the best catch in town, too.

And so the film starts as an engrossing portrait of a likeable couple in the first flushes of love, playing house and making love to the soundtrack of the crashing waves below them, all shot beautifully by cinematographer Adam Arkapaw. But things don't stay perfect forever, becoming darker and harsher as Isabel's desire to become a mother becomes more urgent. This burning maternal desire leads the pair to make a fateful decision — one that will haunt them for the rest of their lives.

It begins when a boat carrying a baby washes up on the beach. This looks like fate to Isabel, but Tom soon discovers the child's true identity and, even worse, that her real mother (Weisz) is still alive. Clearly, this presents him with a terrible dilemma — return the child to its mother, or betray his wife. Fassbender comes into his own here as his character wrestles with his conscience while trying to protect Isabel,

who's now blissfully happy with a child she is calling her own. It's an initially gripping scenario: lives will be ruined whichever way he decides to go, so the stakes are high.

It's also here that audiences may become divided as the film changes tack: morphing from the intense romantic drama it started as into a twist-driven melodrama. As the third act rumbles on, there's something undeniably frustrating about the choices the characters make — as though they're based less on realistic human decision-making and more on adding twists to the narrative. The result is that rather than being lost in the story you become more aware you're being manipulated by a writer.

But there is always the possibility of redemption and hope, both for the characters and the film. Much like he did in *The Place Beyond The Pines*, Cianfrance takes his characters to dark places before bringing them back up for air — scarred, but wiser. And by the end, despite the contrivances that got us there, it's a hardy soul who won't leave feeling moved. **ANNA SMITH**

VERDICT Vikander and Fassbender are riveting in a handsome period drama that begins beautifully, but becomes increasingly contrived as it tries to wring as much drama as possible from its set-up.



RUPTURE

★★

OUT 4 NOVEMBER / CERT 15 / 99 MINS

DIRECTOR Steven Shainberg

CAST Noomi Rapace, Peter Stormare, Kerry Bishé, Michael Chiklis

OUR HERO IS captured and tied up in a room, the bad guys go for a coffee break, and the hero escapes through an air vent using a concealed penknife. A film that presents this as a pivotal scene is unlikely to score highly in the originality or inventiveness stakes, and so it proves with this sci-fi, in which a single parent of a 12-year-old son is captured by a mysterious cult for a mysterious reason. The reliably great Rapace as Renee Morgan gives good terrified mother, and Chiklis (in Brent goatee and business suit combo) is a decent-enough menace. But the big explanation as to why he and his cronies are doing what they're doing is not only flimsy, but takes forever to arrive. **HM**



THE INNOCENTS

★★★★

OUT 11 NOVEMBER / CERT 15 / 115 MINS

DIRECTOR Anne Fontaine

CAST Lou de Laâge, Agata Buzek, Agata Kulesza, Vincent Macaigne

BASED ON THE story of a French Red Cross doctor who treated the pregnant Polish nuns raped by Soviet soldiers at the end of World War II, this is a painterly, austere study of faith and duty that raises troubling questions about the sanctity of life and the Catholic Church's attitude to the Holocaust. The ensemble playing is outstanding, with de Laâge's compassionate medic contrasting with Kulesza's stern abbess, who fears ramifications from the incoming Communists if the convent's secret is discovered. Fontaine doesn't entirely avoid sentimentality, but there's gentle humour which is deftly handled, and the use of the wintry setting is exceptional. **DP**



CINEMA

THE ACCOUNTANT

★★

OUT 15 NOVEMBER

CERT 15 / 125 MINS

DIRECTOR Gavin O'Connor

CAST Ben Affleck, Anna Kendrick, J.K. Simmons, Jon Bernthal, John Lithgow

PLOT Autistic maths wizard Christian Wolff (Affleck) has a lucrative business as a freelance accountant for dangerous criminal organisations. But when the US treasury closes in, he takes on a legitimate client only to discover corruption and murder afoot.

IN 1988, OSCAR-GRABBING

blockbuster *Rain Man* drew the blueprint for portraying autism in mainstream cinema, painting the condition as a kind of adorable super power, thanks to Dustin Hoffman's shuffling performance as maths savant Raymond Babbitt. *The Accountant* riffs on this now familiar approach, imbuing its autistic lead character Christian Wolff (Affleck) with a supernatural talent for preparing accurate tax returns, but also shooting guns — especially the gigantic sniper rifle he keeps in his modest rural home. Could there be more to this finicky loner than meets the eye?

Of course there is — it soon transpires he's using his small-town accounting business as a front for a more lucrative role, processing money for international crime lords. However, when treasury investigator Raymond King (Simmons) starts sniffing around, Wolff decides to take on a more legitimate contract — helping the founder of a robotics company find the \$60 million that's gone missing from the firm's coffers. Clue: it hasn't fallen down the back of the sofa.

What follows is a stilted tale of financial irregularity and bloody revenge, uniting various parties in a desperate but ultimately futile search for dramatic tension. Wolff turns up at the robot factory, does some complicated sums, meets plucky young accountancy junior Dana (Kendrick), and accidentally uncovers a scandal,

while King inexplicably blackmails one of his own staff into investigating Wolff's shady CV.

Intercut with the contemporary action are little snippets of the protagonist's troubled upbringing with a crazed military father, who thinks the best way to deal with autism is to expose his boy to all the things he's terrified of — while also teaching him martial arts. What could possibly go wrong? Sure enough, as Wolff is drawn deeper into the movie's elaborate corruption plot, we discover he's an efficient and emotionless killer, dispatching hitmen and mercenaries with cold, calculated indifference.

But *The Accountant* does get lots of little details about autism right: Affleck has trouble with eye contact, doesn't understand complex social cues, irony or gratitude, and likes to separate all the different foods on his dinner plate. He also gets very upset when he can't finish a task, whether that's a jigsaw puzzle or the robotics company's complicated accounting situation when his contract is abruptly cancelled. But as soon as the killing starts, the movie shifts gear and presents a kind of weaponised autism, where an inability to express empathy is wilfully re-read as an inability to actually feel it.

Affleck's performance isn't bad and we get excellent if familiar supporting turns from Kendrick, Lithgow and Simmons. But nothing makes an awful lot of sense. Character motivations are glossed over, explanatory scenes are jammed in haphazardly, and the finale relies on a tonally bizarre combination of schmaltz, coincidence and violence that seems to betray the arc of the whole movie.

An epilogue at the close of the movie acts like a public information film about how people with autism are not dangerous loners, they're just different — a point that the proceeding two hours does its best to muddy. Indeed, *The Accountant* is as confusing and seemingly futile as an HMRC tax credit form — and it only takes marginally less time to complete. **KEITH STUART**

VERDICT A noisy, disjointed financial thriller that's often accurate in its depiction of its hero's autism, but then blows its good work in service of its action beats.



CINEMA

KEEPING UP WITH THE JONESES

★★

OUT NOW
CERT TBC / 101 MINS

DIRECTOR Greg Mottola

CAST Zach Galifianakis, Jon Hamm, Isla Fisher, Gal Gadot, Matt Walsh

PLOT Jeff and Karen Gaffney (Galifianakis and Fisher) are an ordinary married couple who begin to suspect their new neighbours, the Joneses (Hamm and Gadot), may well be assassins.

THERE'S A GREAT comedy to be made about a nice guy who starts to suspect that his new next-door neighbours are up to no good, and whose resultant paranoia leads to an explosive escalation of events that threatens his marriage, his home, and his life.

And it already exists. It's Joe Dante's *The 'Burbs*, not Greg Mottola's *Keeping Up With the Joneses*, a rather muddled effort which doesn't even begin to explore the comedic potential of its premise: what would you do if you lived next to two super-spies who might be out to kill you?

The problem here is in comedic tension, or the lack thereof. The question of whether Hamm and Gadot's cool, sexy Joneses, who've moved next door to Galifianakis and Fisher's staid, safe Jeff and Karen Gaffney, are super-spies is resolved fairly quickly (no prizes for guessing that they are). From that point on, it's all about their true intentions as they inveigle their way into the Gaffneys' life — are they John and Jane Bond, good guys sent to protect them? Or John and Jane Smith, murderous assassins sent to glean crucial info before offing them?

There's perhaps a version of this movie where we never find out until the last reel, and where comedy springs naturally from the tension as Galifianakis and Fisher, suspicions aroused, poke into their neighbours' affairs. But,

perhaps because the Joneses are played by two major movie stars who demand a fair chunk of screen time, that never quite happens. Instead, we get a series of mildly amusing sequences where the Gaffneys bond with the Joneses over a drunken encounter at a clandestine snake restaurant (yes, the men), or a weird moment trying on sexy underwear in a shopping-mall changing room (yes, the women). There's nothing surprising or unexpected about these scenes — does exposure to the Gaffneys awaken a yearning in the Joneses for the more mundane aspects of life? You betcha. In turn, do the Gaffneys find the spark their slightly dull marriage needs? Take a wild guess.

There are some chuckles — Gadot has a few good zingers poking fun at her ridiculous good looks ("Just because I don't need to moisturise doesn't mean I don't have feelings"). Otherwise, though, the overwhelming feeling is that the film is plagued by the spectre that haunts so much modern American comedy: improvisation. There is a script (by Michael LeSieur) — there has to be with a comedy this plot-heavy — but all too often there's a feeling that the cast are floundering around, left to fend for themselves and find the punchlines. It's a waste of some excellent comedic talent, including Fisher, Walsh (from *Veep*), and Hamm, who has been hilarious on the likes of *30 Rock* and *Saturday Night Live*. But nowhere is the sense of an opportunity missed stronger than with Galifianakis, who's straitjacketed in a role as a loveable schlub. Galifianakis is an actor who revels in anarchy; here, he's reduced to watching the anarchy unfold from the periphery, and you can almost sense his palpable frustration.

If the comedy in an action-comedy doesn't quite deliver, then everything depends on the action. Mottola's handled booms and bangs before, notably in *Paul*, but an extended set-piece featuring cars, bikes and lots of screaming fails to excite, while the final face-off is as humdrum as they come. It's just a shame the action is ham-fisted when it should have been Hamm-fisted. **CHRIS HEWITT**

VERDICT An unfortunate misfire that has the odd moment of charm and the odder chuckle, but otherwise isn't worth keeping up with.



A STREET CAT NAMED BOB

★★

OUT 4 NOVEMBER / CERT 12A / 103 MINS

DIRECTOR Roger Spottiswoode

CAST Luke Treadaway, Joanne Froggatt

BASED ON JAMES Bowen's real-life memoir, this account of a homeless recovering methadone addict whose fortunes are turned around by a ginger moggy is a curious cat. Part Ken Loach social drama, part CBBC adventure, it never lands on a tone that successfully integrates deaths by overdose with comedy dog-versus-cat street chases. The human stuff sees Bowen (an amiable Treadaway) try to stay on the right side of social worker Val (Froggatt), reconnect with his dad (Anthony Head) and start a relationship with an animal-lover-next-door (Ruta Gedmintas). The cat stuff — including a gimmicky cat's-eye-view device — chiefly involves Bob looking cute on Treadaway's shoulders. Together, neither strand is dramatic or enchanting enough to satisfy. **IF**



INDIGNATION

★★★★

OUT 18 NOVEMBER / CERT 15 / 111 MINS

DIRECTOR James Schamus

CAST Logan Lerman, Sarah Gadon

A COMING-OF-AGE TALE adapted from Philip Roth's novel, this is a strong first feature from James Schamus after years at the top of the screenwriter pile. Newark butcher's son Marcus (Lerman) heads to a conservative Ohio college in the 1950s, where he faces religious discrimination, student tension and a strange fascination with the troubled Olivia (Gadon). The centrepiece of the film, and by far the funniest scenes, are the self-righteous confrontations between the faintly priggish Marcus and the college's moralistic Dean (Tracy Letts) — both sure of their own virtue and faintly condescending towards the other. The rest of the film can be a little too solemn at times, but this is still the best Roth adaptation yet. **HOB**

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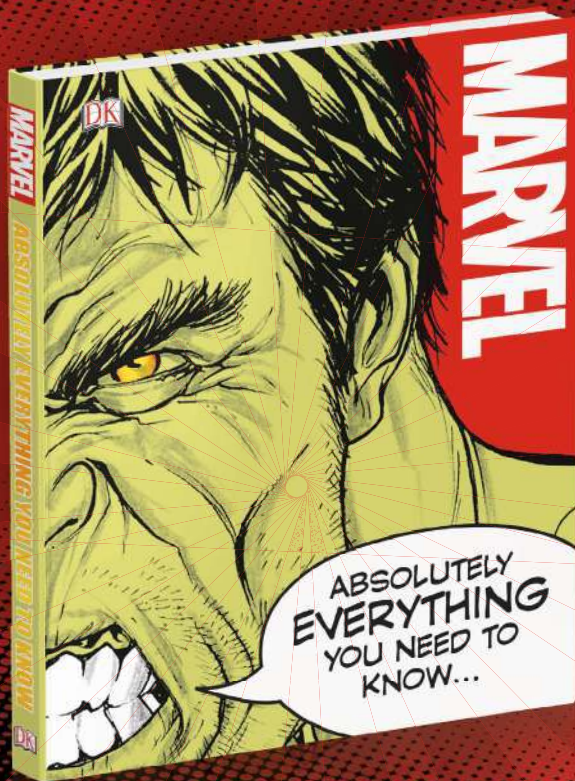
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Word up: Linklater with Julie Delpy and Ethan Hawke on the set of *Before Sunrise*.

CINEMA

RICHARD LINKLATER: DREAM IS DESTINY

★★★★★

OUT 4 NOVEMBER
CERT TBC / 86 MINS

DIRECTOR Louis Black

CAST Richard Linklater, Ethan Hawke, Julie Delpy, Matthew McConaughey, Jack Black

PLOT How Richard Stuart Linklater went from a baseball-obsessed student to one of the most distinctive voices in American film.

BLOCKBUSTER SEASON MAY have underwhelmed, but here's some consolation: it's a good year for engaging documentary portraits of filmmakers. Following *Hitchcock/Truffaut* and *De Palma*, *Richard Linklater: Dream Is Destiny* is a portrait of one of the most compelling, idiosyncratic filmmakers working today. Employing the standard mix of talking-head interviews, on-set footage and archive TV appearances, all linked by Linklater talking through his private journals, Louis Black's

film shares many traits with the man himself — candid, intelligent, warm and relaxed — although it perhaps lacks the director's sense of adventure.

Dream Is Destiny (it's a line from *Waking Life*) is a chronological trawl through Linklater's life and work. The early years include his baseball writing-obsessed school days, his early attempts at one-man-band filmmaking (he shot and starred in a short while simultaneously recording sound on a Walkman) and his pivotal role in establishing Austin as an indie film hotspot. Talking heads line up to discuss his work ethic and his intense desire to foster collaboration ("I have never heard Rick say the word 'no'," says McConaughey).

The film spends the most time on Linklater's three big landmarks. The director freely admits that *Slacker* wouldn't make the impact now that it did in 1991, and the film does a good job etching why it surfed a cultural moment. *Before Sunrise* started life as an American train journey until European subsidies made it cheaper to shoot abroad — but the real revelations come with the sequels. Julie Delpy is particularly funny about how her agent dropped her for writing *Before Sunset* rather than "audition for *Rush Hour 3*", and Linklater is equally candid about how the creativity of *Sunset* "saved my life"

while *Before Midnight* was the "hardest film I have ever been a part of". The documentary ends on the mighty *Boyhood*, which flits in and out of the timeline; Linklater admits he was worried that stringing together banal moments might not be the best use of the 12-year shoot. Watching young Ellar Coltrane finish his final shot in the movie, after working on it for more than a decade and most of his life, is bizarrely moving.

Dream Is Destiny is also interesting on Linklater's uneasy relationship with Hollywood, and doesn't shy away from the financial failures of studio films *Dazed And Confused* and *The Newton Boys*. While we see Linklater at work in his Austin production base ("a low-rent Skywalker Ranch", he quips), the film doesn't delve deeply into how his personal life informs his art. But, as Ethan Hawke says, Linklater's films feel like you could dream them up yourself, and that mixture of the simple and the profound is present here too. A valuable document of an important talent. **IAN FREER**

VERDICT *Dream Is Destiny* is a potent, entertaining reminder of just why Richard Linklater is a filmmaker to be cherished. It's also a persuasive argument that, sometimes, good guys do finish first.



CINEMA

ETHEL & ERNEST

★★★★

OUT 28 OCTOBER
CERT TBC / 94 MINS

DIRECTOR Roger Mainwood

CAST (VOICES) Jim Broadbent, Pam Ferris,
Brenda Blethyn

PLOT Animation based on author and illustrator Raymond Briggs' graphic novel about his parents (Blethyn and Broadbent). The story follows their marriage through the war years and beyond.

THERE'S A LIVE-action prologue to *Ethel & Ernest*, in which Raymond Briggs explains how his parents would have been pleased, but slightly embarrassed, to see their story on a bestseller list. Imagine, then, what they'd make of this — a film adaptation where they're voiced by Brenda Blethyn and Jim Broadbent. They lived an ordinary life, but this is what makes the film so refreshing. We're so accustomed to seeing World War II through the eyes of soldiers on the front line, or royalty, or politicians — instead, this likeable London couple give an insight into the fate of those too old to be evacuated and then watch their young son be evacuated and then build an air-raid shelter in the back yard.

Visually, the film stays faithful to the distinct, old-fashioned animation that Briggs is so synonymous with. There are nods to his most famous book, *The Snowman*, as young Raymond enjoys Christmas in his rural hideout. But the action mostly stays close to Ethel and Ernest — Blethyn and Broadbent are perfect choices, especially during the couple's older years. After a cute courtship, as they move into their home in Wimbledon ("£825!" exclaims Ethel, wondering how they will afford it), their personalities become distinct. He's a chipper, respectable working-class lad with a twinkle in his eye and a spring in his step, a Labour supporter who takes a moderate interest in politics. She's a house-proud would-be mother with a kind

heart and modest aspirations: God forbid anyone actually call them working-class, or suggest her son isn't fit for a grammar school. The contrasts between them are good for a few laughs as the film drops in on their life during times of national crisis: as he strains to hear the wireless, she chides him to switch it off, busying herself with domestic matters. There are gender and class stereotypes here, but they're tempered by the huge affection with which Briggs depicts his parents. And, as he lived it, it seems safe to assume this is how they were. Voiced by Luke Treadaway, Briggs as a young man doesn't get off unscathed either — he gently mocks the hippy pretensions of his younger self as he leaves grammar school and attends art college. This is, of course, something his mother reacts to with horror, especially as it brings such gleeful joy to their competitive neighbour.

The problems with *Ethel & Ernest's* format become clear around halfway through, when the scenes begin to feel repetitive. A major event happens, he comments on it, she expresses political ignorance, then tuts at her husband before tidying the house. And so it goes on. What began as amusing feels a little tired and predictable — and what works in the format of a graphic novel doesn't necessarily translate to the big screen quite as effectively. The hindsight-related gags also come thick and fast: Ethel comments that TV will only be used by "the gentry", which would be amusing had there not been several similar jokes before it. The biggest laugh-out-loud moment comes when a neighbour on the milk round asks Ernest to service his demanding wife.

Still, despite its repetitive nature, overall *Ethel & Ernest* proves to be a quietly moving tribute to a real-life couple who are extraordinary precisely because of their very ordinary life. **ANNA SMITH**

VERDICT A charming animation with funny — if samey — moments and a quality voice cast. If the first 15 minutes of *Up* were set in London, animated by Raymond Briggs and stretched into a feature-length film, it might look a bit like this.



FRANCOFONIA

★★★★

OUT 11 NOVEMBER / CERT TBC / 88 MINS

DIRECTOR Alexander Sokurov

CAST Louis-Do de Lencquesaing, Benjamin
Utzerath, Vincent Nemeth

RUSSIAN MAESTRO ALEXANDER Sokurov examines the link between art and power in this compelling documentary that centres on the plot to protect the Louvre from Nazi plunderers. Blending contemplative voiceover with evocative archive material and dramatic reconstruction, Sokurov also denounces ISIL's philistine destruction of artworks and the ongoing refugee crisis, while questioning Russia's European status. But this restless treatise also reflects on how national cultures have been refined by the spoils of war and how time has transformed Napoleon from a tyrant into a hero. Technically accomplished, deeply personal and playfully provocative, this is intriguing and intoxicating. **DP**



TROLLS

★★★★

OUT NOW / CERT U / 92 MINS

DIRECTORS Mike Mitchell, Walt Dohrn

CAST Anna Kendrick, Justin Timberlake,
Christopher Mintz-Plasse, Zooey Deschanel

FUZZY-HEADED RESIDENTS of many a '90s school desk, Thomas Dam's ugly little Good Luck Trolls don't have much backstory to bring to the screen. But while *The LEGO Movie* showed that lack of in-built narrative can be an opportunity to let your imagination run wild, this aims lower. A creative team that has worked on various *Shreks* and *Kung Fu Pandas* has put together a straightforward plot about the happy trolls trying to avoid being eaten by bigger, uglier monsters. The voice cast (Kendrick, Timberlake) is peppy; the songs are recycled pop hits; it's funny enough to induce smiles if not laughs. Cute and likeable, if not a great deal more. **OR**



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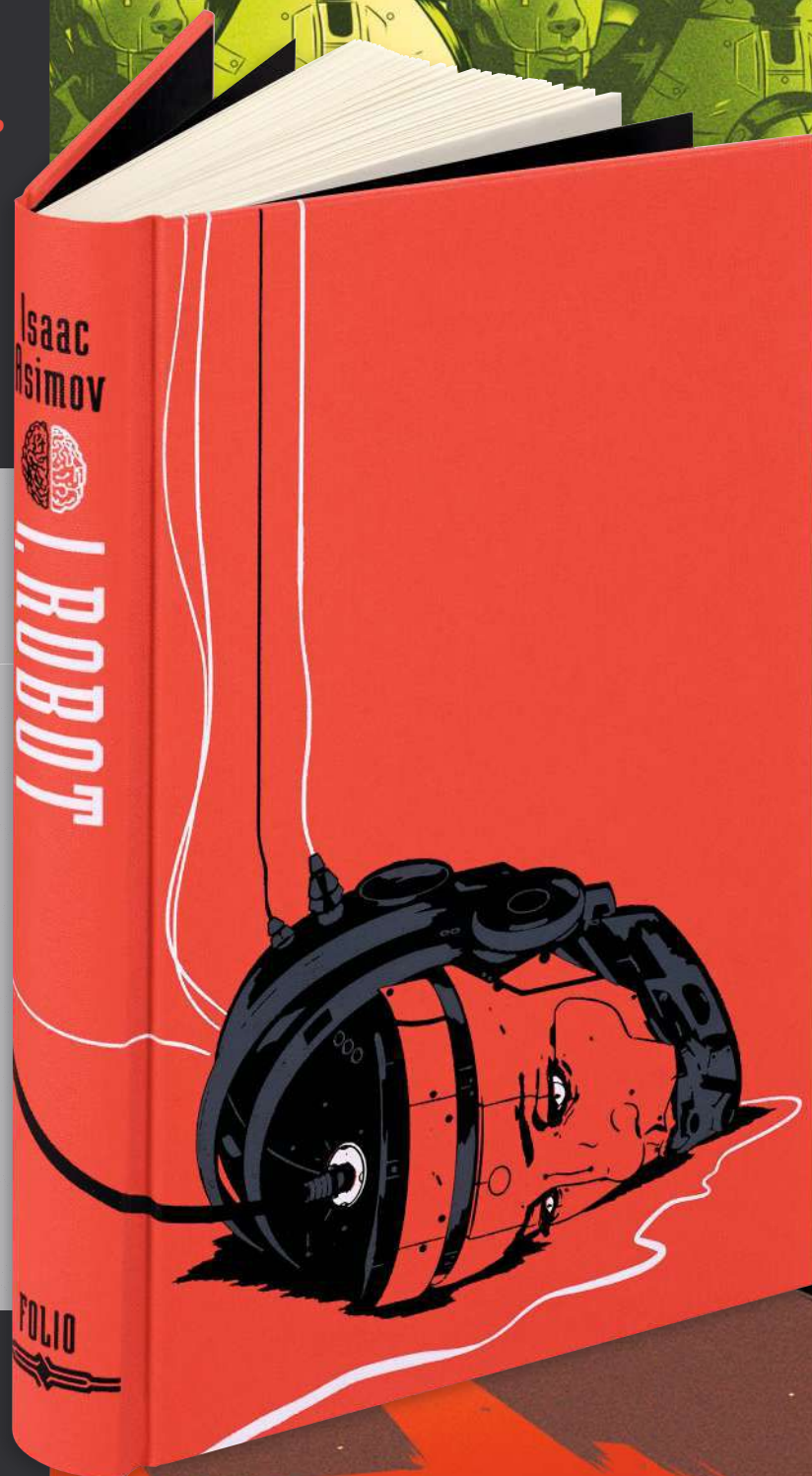


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that'll set your hair on fire'

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CINEMA

JACK REACHER: NEVER GO BACK



OUT NOW
CERT 12A / 118 MINS

DIRECTOR Edward Zwick
CAST Tom Cruise, Cobie Smulders, Danika Yarosh, Patrick Heusinger, Aldis Hodge, Robert Knepper

PLOT When Major Turner (Smulders), Reacher's (Cruise) successor in the Military Police, is arrested for espionage, he starts poking around. When he's then framed for murder, he busts her out and they set out to clear their names.

SURE, HE'S A fine actor, but what Tom Cruise does *really* well is run. And Ed Zwick, having directed him before, clearly knows that. So, as *Never Go Back* approaches the half-hour mark and with Cruise yet to break into anything above a brisk walk, Zwick cuts to him sprinting for a cab. And then, to make up for lost time presumably, a few minutes later he runs for a bus. He may be 54 now (and it's not quite him trying to outrun a sandstorm), but watching Cruise run has lost none of its thrill.

Of course that is, technically, another stick with which doubters can beat this cinematic Reacher, should they be so inclined. Book Reacher's lumbering lack of speed is a rare weakness and is brought up semi-regularly, but clearly it's not an issue here. (Even though he does miss that bus.) But it feels, two movies in, as though it's time to make peace. For better or worse, taller or shorter, when it comes to cinematic Reacher, Cruise is our man.

And (despite all that running) there is good news. Zwick here takes Reacher closer to the books — tougher, gruffer and no longer boasting the skills of a stunt-car driver. (At least, not that we're shown.) In fact, he's usually in the passenger seat. The opening scene, which sees police arrive at a diner with four bodies writhing in agony on the car park floor, and Reacher calmly sitting inside drinking his coffee, is a perfect example — an *Indiana Jones*-style end-of-the-last-adventure vignette that immediately sets the scene for this grittier vision. We're not in the same territory in terms of stylistic differences as *Mission: Impossible* and its immediate sequel — there are no slo-mo doves here — but it's still a noticeably different beast.

The stakes are higher here than in *Jack Reacher* — he's framed for murder after poking around in the arrest of Turner (Smulders), the

major who's doing his old job in the Military Police. She's been accused of espionage, but Reacher senses something's afoot (which his arrest proves), so he breaks them both out of prison and they go on the run, closely followed by hitmen determined to stop them. Plus there's an added wrinkle: 15-year-old Samantha (Yarosh), a girl Reacher's only just found out about, who may or may not be his daughter, is also caught in the firing line. Cue familial-style bickering between the three.

According to Lee Child, the presence of Samantha in *Never Go Back* is one of the main reasons this story was chosen, and it's an interesting addition in terms of Reacher's character development — will the drifter find an anchor? Sure, it took 18 books of wandering for this particular paternity issue to come up and we're only on film two, but it's not without precedent — the issue of settling down was raised as early as book three when Reacher inherited a house (he decided against it).

Reacher's also drafted back into the army after a clause in his release papers is activated, allowing them (rather than the police) to hold him for the murder he's accused of. This sets up some soul-searching about whether someone like him can ever have a normal life, and brings up the question about why he left in the first place. "Let's just say, I woke one morning and the uniform didn't fit," he tells Turner.

But where *Never Goes Back* does fall short in comparison with *Jack Reacher*, despite the lower stakes, is the central mystery. *One Shot*, the book the first film is based on, boasted one of the best (if not *the* best) of the entire series. *Never Go Back* does not. Recognising that, much here has been changed from the source material. Some necessary (the book fizzles out whereas this builds to a final showdown), some just different — no LA, as soon as the trio leave DC they head to party town New Orleans, where the finale just happens to coincide with the annual Hallowe'en parade. But the murky machinations of the arms-dealing still can't compete with the purity of the original's sniper mystery. Next time it would be wise to choose one of the better-plotted books — *Killing Floor* or *Bad Luck And Trouble* perhaps.

And it looks likely there will be a next time. This is only the second instance where Tom Cruise has committed to a sequel, and presumably it's with eyes on a long-running franchise. With *M:I* it took him three movies to nail the tone and formula; with *Reacher* he's managed it a film earlier. **JONATHAN PILE**

VERDICT Overall, a superior sequel. Some people will never get over the height discrepancy but character-wise, *Never Goes Back* brings Reacher closer to the books for the type of thriller that rarely gets made these days.





Their Hallowe'en costumes were frankly rubbish.



CINEMA

INFERNO

★★

OUT NOW
CERT 12A / 121 MINS**DIRECTOR** Ron Howard**CAST** Tom Hanks, Felicity Jones, Omar Sy, Sidse Babett Knudsen, Irrfan Khan

PLOT Symbolologist Robert Langdon (Hanks) wakes up in a Florence hospital bed with memory loss. When he's attacked, Dr Sienna Brooks (Jones) must help him escape and find out what's going on.

AFTER THE PROFITABLE but little-praised *The Da Vinci Code* and *Angels & Demons*, this third Ron Howard and Tom Hanks adaptation of a Dan Brown book sees the filmmakers once again elevating weak material. Sadly, with lines like, "He has the Faraday pointer!" even their best efforts can't quite make this gripping. We've seen James Bond and his mates save the world from bioweapons multiple times already, and replacing a remote-controlled BMW with a Botticelli isn't a significant upgrade, cinematically speaking.

This instalment does manage two surprisingly clever things. First of all, it establishes Ben Foster's Zobrist — an evil name if ever there was one — as a tech billionaire so obsessed with over-population he's created a man-made plague to decimate humanity. Then the film kills him off in its opening minutes. After that, everyone's in a race against time to find his bioweapon before it's triggered.

Secondly, the film also strips our hero, Tom Hanks' Professor Robert Langdon, of his chief weapon: his brain. Reeling from a head wound and suffering nightmarish Hieronymus Bosch-esque hallucinations, the obnoxious mansplainer of the first two films is unusually vulnerable and initially dependent on Felicity Jones' Dr Sienna Brooks for help. She is a former child prodigy who enjoys the usual millennial pastimes of working for Doctors Without Borders, marathon-running and obsessing over Dante. The last hobby enables her to occasionally pre-empt

Langdon's problem-solving as they race around Florence in search of clues, but really her CV suggests she would be able to figure out the whole thing more quickly without him.

Despite that new blood, it's soon business as usual. Langdon races around Italian Tourism Board-approved locations, vandalising works of art associated with Dante, in search of clues. Assassins march after him, somehow figuring out the same clues as he does without the benefit of degrees in symbology — whatever that is. And international agencies bulging with suspicious employees chase after *them*. In this version of reality, the World Health Organisation boasts a paramilitary force that kicks doors down and has private jets standing by, which seems unlikely. Still, with the fate of half the global population at stake, perhaps they're simply, and justifiably, keen.

Aside from traces of Hanks charm sneaking through Langdon's dourness, it all threatens to become stifflingly dull. But just as you start to suffer museum fatigue, Irrfan Khan shows up to goose things a little. He's Harry 'The Provost' Sims, the head of a laughably shady organisation known as The Consortium, and he merrily throws spanners in everyone's plans and looks good doing it. Frankly he's the best reason to watch the film's second half. Omar Sy and *Borgen*'s Sidse Babett Knudsen get less to work with, but manage to give paper-thin characters a flicker of interest.

The backdrop is outrageously scenic, with a typical chase running through Florence's Boboli Gardens into the Uffizi and along the streets of the town's centre. The film's so determined to take in the sights that it's a bit of a shock that none of the clues are pinned to the back of Michelangelo's David like a "kick me" sign. But the revelations in this tale are much too easy to spot coming, and after setting up an interesting ethical dilemma about humanity's future — the real risks from over-population — it utterly ignores it for the usual bad-guy posturing. For a film about smart people being smart, you just wish the plotting were a little more nuanced. **HELEN O'HARA**

VERDICT It's not the worst of the trilogy, but this is less for fans of thrillers and more for people pining after last year's holiday to Florence.



STORKS

★★

OUT NOW / CERT U / 90 MINS

DIRECTORS Nicholas Stoller, Doug Sweetland
CAST Andy Samberg, Jennifer Aniston, Ty Burrell

NICHOLAS STOLLER HAS made some fun comedies (*Bad Neighbours*, *Forgetting Sarah Marshall*) and Doug Sweetland made the charming Pixar short *Presto*, but their animated team-up is a bird-brained oddity that starts with a whole load of ideas, but never knits them into a single story. It's set in a world where storks once delivered babies, but now deliver parcels. When a baby is accidentally marked for delivery, Junior the stork (Andy Samberg) has to ship it out before his boss notices. From there, the plot is all over the place. Peculiarly for animation, it has the quality of feeling almost entirely improvised, but only in the sense that it appears nobody has any real idea what should happen next. **OR**



THE GIRL ON THE TRAIN

★★

OUT NOW / CERT 15 / 112 MINS

DIRECTOR Tate Taylor

CAST Emily Blunt, Haley Bennett, Rebecca Ferguson, Luke Evans, Justin Theroux

A GEOGRAPHICALLY RELOCATED thriller that forgets to thrill. Instead of riding the train from fictional Buckinghamshire town of Ashbury into Euston, Rachel (Blunt) now travels from upstate New York into Manhattan, but the scenic location is actually one of the best aspects of this adaptation, which never fully engages. There are too few suspects and red herrings to get your mind whirring, while the twists don't have the impact intended. The alcoholism of Rachel, who involves herself in a missing persons case because she thinks she saw something from her commuter train, is tackled with unflinching honesty — but Blunt fails to fully escape her star power to believably portray such a damaged character. **JP**



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TV & STREAMING

THE CROWN



NETFLIX

OUT 4 NOVEMBER

EPISODES VIEWED 1-10

SHOWRUNNER Peter Morgan

CAST Claire Foy, Matt Smith, John Lithgow, Victoria Hamilton, Jared Harris

PLOT After the sudden death of her father, King George VI (Harris), Princess Elizabeth (Foy) ascends to the throne. Dogged by problems with her husband Philip (Smith), her sister (Kirby) and cantankerous Prime Minister Winston Churchill (Lithgow), the new queen struggles to balance her personal life with her royal duties.

YOU WAIT YEARS for a lavish period drama about the inner life of an era-spanning British queen and then... well, you can see where we're going with this, can't you? With ITV's hit *Victoria* still just about visible in the cultural rearview, here comes another regal retelling from Netflix.

So is there room in the age of Peak TV for two similarly pitched projects? And how much binge-worthy intrigue can be wrung from historical plot points you can easily check on Wikipedia? Thankfully, a couple of episodes into the maiden series of *The Crown*, any grumbles about repetitive commissioning — or, whisper it, cynical cash-ins for a post-*Downton Abbey* age — melt away. From top to bottom, this is an immaculate piece of serialised storytelling: a glossy shoo-in for next year's Emmys that also manages to be a surprisingly dark examination of the tussle between the private and the public.

Of course, given *The Crown's* pedigree, this level of quality is more of a pleasing relief than a total shock. Created by screenwriter Peter Morgan, already an unofficial royal chronicler thanks to his work on *The Queen* (and his rewrites on *King Ralph*), it's effectively a spin-off of Morgan's hit play *The Audience*. That wowed the West End and Broadway by imagining 60 years of real-life private audiences between Dame Helen Mirren's Elizabeth II and Prime Ministers ranging from Churchill and Thatcher to Blair and Cameron.

The reported budget of this show is around £100 million, Stephen Daldry (*Billy Elliot*) directs two of the ten episodes, Hans Zimmer created the stirring main theme and the stated ambition is six separate series, each spanning a decade, to bring us up to date. So all the pieces are in place, but it's still impressive to see them function so well as we open in 1947 with Elizabeth (Foy), the

elder princess of the British royal family, poised to marry a swashbuckling Greek royal called Philip (Smith).

All seems idyllic as we whip through the intervening post-war years — sweeping shots of a sun-drenched Mediterranean boat race and a royal trip to Nairobi flex financial muscle and add to the escapist Sunday primetime feel — until Elizabeth's father King George VI's (Harris) habit of ominously coughing blood into handkerchiefs intrudes. George (as anyone with a passing knowledge of British history will tell you) dies and, at the age of 25, Elizabeth is suddenly handed the throne.

This is the catalyst for something of an expensively costumed origin story as the young queen navigates weekly meetings with an ailing Prime Minister Winston Churchill (John Lithgow), her sister Margaret's (Vanessa Kirby) contentious wish to marry a divorced man, an increasingly unhappy marriage and other hefty mid-century challenges. In fact, although *The Crown* is notionally a gossip peek within the vaulted halls of Buckingham Palace, Morgan cleverly uses Elizabeth's fledgling reign as a means to examine all manner of other big ideas.

Yes, there are a few moments ripe for the press to whip into a treasonous scandal (one deeply suggestive exchange in the royal bedroom springs to mind), but Morgan mostly trades *The Audience's* larky tone for something more contemplative and touches on everything from governments ignoring the evidence of environmental science (the fourth episode vividly recreates the toxic pea-souper that hit London in 1952) to the emergence of a rampant celebrity culture. The comparatively low stakes may throw off some Netflix-obsessives weaned on Mexican drug cartels and women's correctional facilities, but Morgan's emotional crescendos pack a surprising punch.

What's more, there's excellent work being done throughout the cast. Smith utterly sells Philip's struggles with the emasculating life of a royal consort, Kirby impresses as an impulsive, petulant Margaret and Lithgow wisely forgoes a full jowl-shaking impression of Churchill for something sadder and quieter. Then there's Foy, who has the unenviable task of adding relatable layers to one of history's most impassive figures. Radical, occasionally feminist and utterly merciless when she needs to 'protect the family', Foy's Elizabeth is a slow-burning revelation who embodies just what makes *The Crown* such an exciting proposition. There's always steel lurking beneath the lace. **JIMI FAMUREWA**

VERDICT **Classy and complex, this epic is anchored by mesmerising performances. It signals the height of Netflix's ambition — not to mention the depth of their pockets.**



Elizabeth posing for her 50 pence portrait.





TV & STREAMING

BLACK MIRROR:
SEASON 3

★★★★

NETFLIX
OUT NOW
EPISODES VIEWED 1-6

SHOWRUNNERS Charlie Brooker, Annabel Jones
CAST Bryce Dallas Howard, Alice Eve, Jerome Flynn, Gugu Mbatha-Raw, Kelly Macdonald

PLOT Six one-off dramas presenting nightmarish scenarios for where the rapid pace of technological change could be taking us.

IT'S OBLIGATORY TO discuss *Black Mirror* as if creator Charlie Brooker is some kind of precog, given his anticipation of posthumous chat-bots, digital demagoguery and our former PM's alleged porcine pursuits. That said, the darkest future this suggests is one where newspaper columnists are given hefty budgets to pour their minds into Netflix's servers.

Despite the media love-in, there are dramatic limitations here. Brooker chooses to structure most of these six new episodes in the same way, leaning on writer's crutch the mystery box, where every character knows what's going on but the audience is kept in the dark until the second half, when everybody comes down with a case of the monologues. The characters and their interactions are subordinate to each episode's concept and world-building. But Brooker often makes it work, his imagination and willingness to follow his pocket universes' internal logic, however brutal, both on point.

Giving away what happens in these tales of the unexpected would remove the fun. They tick off a shopping list of contemporary tech questions, from augmented reality to the seductions of nostalgia, from social media swarming to the digital afterlife.

The strongest are genre riffs, with *10 Cloverfield Lane* director Dan Trachtenberg

delivering multiple pastiches in 'Playtest', in which Wyatt Russell agrees to test a new game and finds himself in a mash-up of Hammer horror, *Inception* and *Bioshock*. The feature-length 'Hated By The Nation' starts off as a locked-room mystery, and mutates into something Heath Ledger's Joker would dream up if he worked in Palo Alto. 'San Junipero', meanwhile, starts off with such an awful take on the '80s you worry the wheels have come off, but it's all redeemed and delivers this season's biggest emotional punch.

The misfires — tellingly, where Brooker shares a writing credit with others — are where things get most didactic. 'Nosedive' centres on Bryce Dallas Howard's drive to make a mark in a world where Instagram and Tripadvisor converge into a nightmare of cupcake fascism. You can see the ending a mile away, and Joe Wright's stylistic direction can't save a script that forgets there's no tragedy without hope. 'Shut Up And Dance' is a plain disaster — a would-be blackmail thriller marred with tensionless journeyman direction, and a curious lack of ambition compared to the scale seen elsewhere.

But four blinding episodes out of six is still a very solid hit rate, a *True Detective*-style slump totally sidestepped. There's nothing as disturbing as previous seasons' 'The National Anthem' or 'White Bear', and 'San Junipero' even brings out a rare note of hope. This is most welcome — previously, *Black Mirror* has been so relentless in its pessimism and misanthropy that it could get exhausting and, yes, predictable. The gentle suggestion that the future might not be one enormous torture chamber is a cheering chink of light in all the darkness, and stands out a mile in a brace of episodes that can get so adolescently bleak, you half expect Brooker to call out his mum for making him tidy his room. The urge to give him a mustn't-grumble, chin-up pep talk is overwhelming after sitting through all six episodes in a row — but then, it wouldn't be the same show. **ANDREW LOWRY**

VERDICT The ideas are for the most part strong, the delivery largely superlative, so jump right in — but be warned, the water's cold. This is the feel-bad hit of the autumn.



MASCOTS

★★★★

NETFLIX / OUT NOW / CERT 15 / 95 MINS

DIRECTOR Christopher Guest
CAST Parker Posey, Tom Bennett, Fred Willard

DIRECTOR CHRISTOPHER GUEST is on very familiar ground with his latest improv mockumentary. Just like *Best In Show*, it follows a bunch of enthusiastic oddballs hoping to win big in a small world, except now it's competing sports mascots rather than dog fanciers. And just like *A Mighty Wind*, it climaxes with a big stage show. Happily, *Mascots* feels less a lazy rehash and more a hug from an old friend. Guest regulars like Parker Posey and Fred Willard are present and playing it as hilariously straight as ever, while newcomers such as Zach Woods and one-time EastEnders Tom Bennett slot in perfectly. Guest might be sticking to his formula, but it remains a winning one. **DJ**



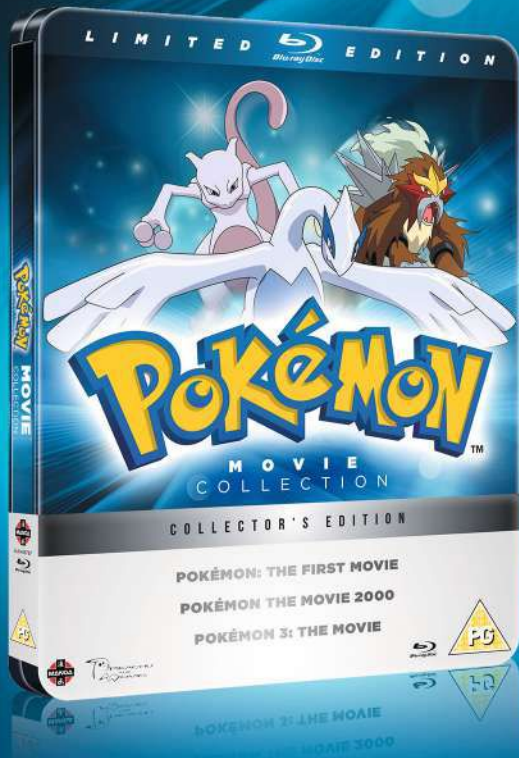
THE IVORY GAME

★★★★

NETFLIX / OUT 4 NOVEMBER / CERT TBC / 112 MINS

DIRECTORS Kief Davidson, Richard Ladkani
CAST Craig Millar, Andrea Crosta, Elisifa Ngowi

THAT ELEPHANTS ARE under threat of extinction due to poaching should come as a surprise to nobody. This documentary, co-produced by Leonardo DiCaprio, aims to show not just the battle to stop poachers but the fight to end the industry funding these deaths. These are the stories of the rangers giving every minute to tracking the herds, lawmen who risk their lives to apprehend dealers, and investigative journalists going undercover in China to trace the ivory traders who smuggle tusks and sell them for huge sums. At so many points it looks like they're fighting a battle that can't be won, but this stirring film celebrates the people who refuse to surrender. **OR**



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GAMES

BATMAN: ARKHAM VR

★★★★★

OUT NOW
FORMATS PSVR

DIRECTOR Sefton Hill

CAST Kevin Conroy, Mark Hamill

PLOT Part murder mystery, part kidnap drama, *Arkham VR* places you in the shiny boots of the titular crusader who must find out what's happened to two of his closest allies.

ACCORDING TO THE tech mavens, it's been the "year of VR" for several years now. But with the launch of Sony's PSVR this month — a black-and-white headset that looks like a prototype prop for a stormtrooper — the medium has finally and fully emerged into the world. Its launch line-up allows you to be bodily transported into the seat of an Aston Martin Vanquish in *DriveClub*, a starfighter in *Eve: Valkyrie* or to the ledge of the GCPD rooftop looking over Gotham City in *Arkham VR*. This last in particular has emerged as a glorious showcase for what VR can — and, it must be noted, cannot — do well.

You might imagine that you'll be fluttering through the night sky, swooping over traffic before taking out one of the Joker's goons with a sharp kick to the chest in *Arkham VR*. Not so. As some of the other PSVR launch titles demonstrate, motion sickness is a major pitfall in virtual reality. To avoid the problem, the *Arkham VR* team has chosen to focus more fully on Batman's sleuthing skills. You move through a number of scenes (including a brief but welcome sojourn to Wayne Manor and its cavernous basement), searching for clues and reconstructing crimes, which you're then able to wind back and forth in real time, crouching and peering to get a better look as you figure out precisely what happened.

In other words, there's a slower pace to the drama. In one scene you find yourself leaning

over a cadaver in an autopsy room, searching the body for pieces of embedded shrapnel which you must gather and piece back together to reconstruct a bomb. If this all sounds a little pedestrian in text, it is magical in VR. The sense of being present in Gotham is extraordinary: you imagine feeling every cobblestone underfoot, hearing the hum of traffic at the end of the alleyway, seeing the grime and deprivation up close. While a crime boss swings upside down from a rope in front of you, spitting with anger, you can lean in to look at the lines on his brow and the hate in his eyes. You may have watched a dozen Batman films and read a thousand Batman comics, but you have never visited Gotham before. Not like this.

Rocksteady, the game's London-based developer, is largely to thank for this. But the hardware does its part, too. While Sony's PSVR is, compared to the Oculus Rift and HTC's Vive, the most underpowered of the virtual reality set, it has numerous benefits over its rivals. There's the price, which undercuts the PC-based systems by hundreds of pounds, especially when you factor in the cost of buying a computer with the necessary processing oomph. And there's the form factor. The PSVR enjoys by far the best product design; it's comfortable on the head, places no pressure on the neck and can accommodate glasses with ease and style. You can spend hours in Gotham without fatigue or headache.

Not that there are hours of game to play here. Just as *Arkham VR* is warming up, it ends abruptly (notably, the game's price tag reflects its brevity). This is an issue with almost all of the PSVR's launch titles. There's a sense that they are glorious tech demos for much larger, longer games, though perhaps that's inevitable with the first, trembling releases in a brand-new medium. Developers are still figuring out the rules and shape of this brave new world, but *Arkham VR* will, at very least, leave you wanting more. **SIMON PARKIN**

VERDICT A short but delicious showcase of VR's potential, *Arkham VR* offers the most rounded of PSVR's launch experiences, implying that perhaps detective work might be an ideal use for this virtual dimension.



GEARS OF WAR 4

★★★★★

OUT NOW / PC, XBOX ONE

DIRECTOR Rod Fergusson

CAST Liam McIntyre, Jimmy Smits, Laura Bailey

MICROSOFT'S COUNTER TO Sony's VR assault comes in the form of *Gears Of War 4*, the latest instalment in the lauded cover-based shooter franchise. Charting events 25 years after the Locust were defeated in *Gears Of War 3*, with you cast as Marcus Fenix's son, it has a much more imaginative single-player story than its predecessors, with all-new enemies The Swarm and a welcome ebb and flow to battles. Meanwhile, its multiplayer side is packed, beautifully structured and accommodates all levels of talent. The addictive Horde mode, retitled Horde 3.0, has a great new twist — it now lets you manufacture your own defences. Slick, great-looking and satisfyingly meaty. **SP**



BATTLEZONE VR

★★★

OUT NOW / PSVR

DIRECTOR Jason Kingsley

CAST Kasumi Abbey-Wyndham

VIRTUAL REALITY MAY exist at the bleeding edge of technological advancement, but thanks to *The Lawnmower Man* and *Tron* there's still a sense that it's a retro invention. *Battlezone VR* plays on the feeling, with a return to the vector tanks of Atari's 1980 classic. You tear around a series of neon wastelands in the glittering, humming cockpit of your tank, taking on a variety of assignments, from shoot-and-kill to escorts to base capturing. Your vehicle, which can be upgraded after each successful mission, is intuitive to control, and the sense of scale, with gun-tower emplacements looming above you, is convincing. The gameplay is basic but comes into its own when teaming up with others in squad-based combat — so long, that is, as you don't get motion sickness. **SB**

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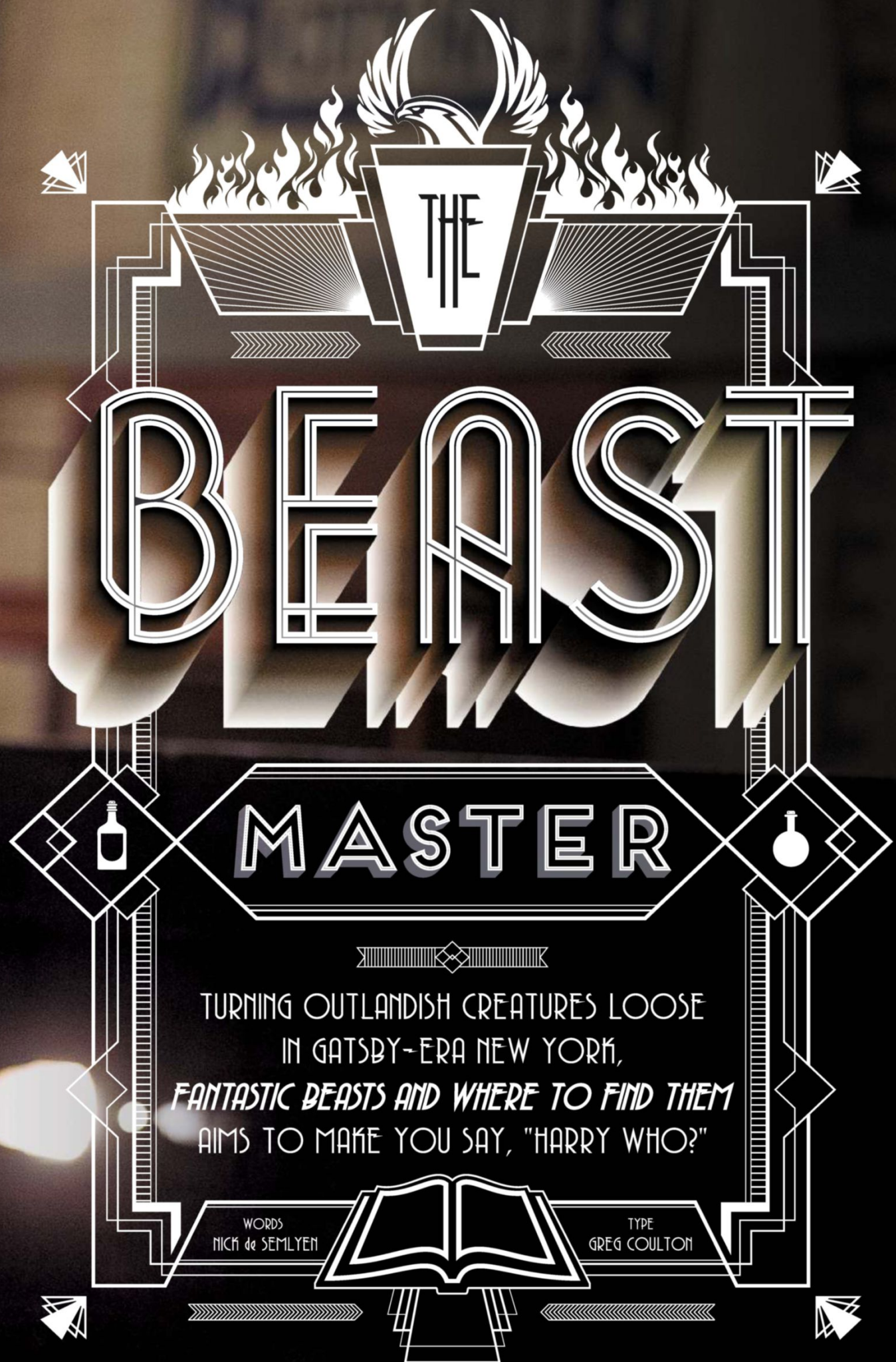
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THE BEAST MASTER

TURNING OUTLANDISH CREATURES LOOSE
IN GATSBY-ERA NEW YORK,
FANTASTIC BEASTS AND WHERE TO FIND THEM
AIMS TO MAKE YOU SAY, "HARRY WHO?"

WORDS
NICH de SEMLYEN

TYPE
GREG COULTON

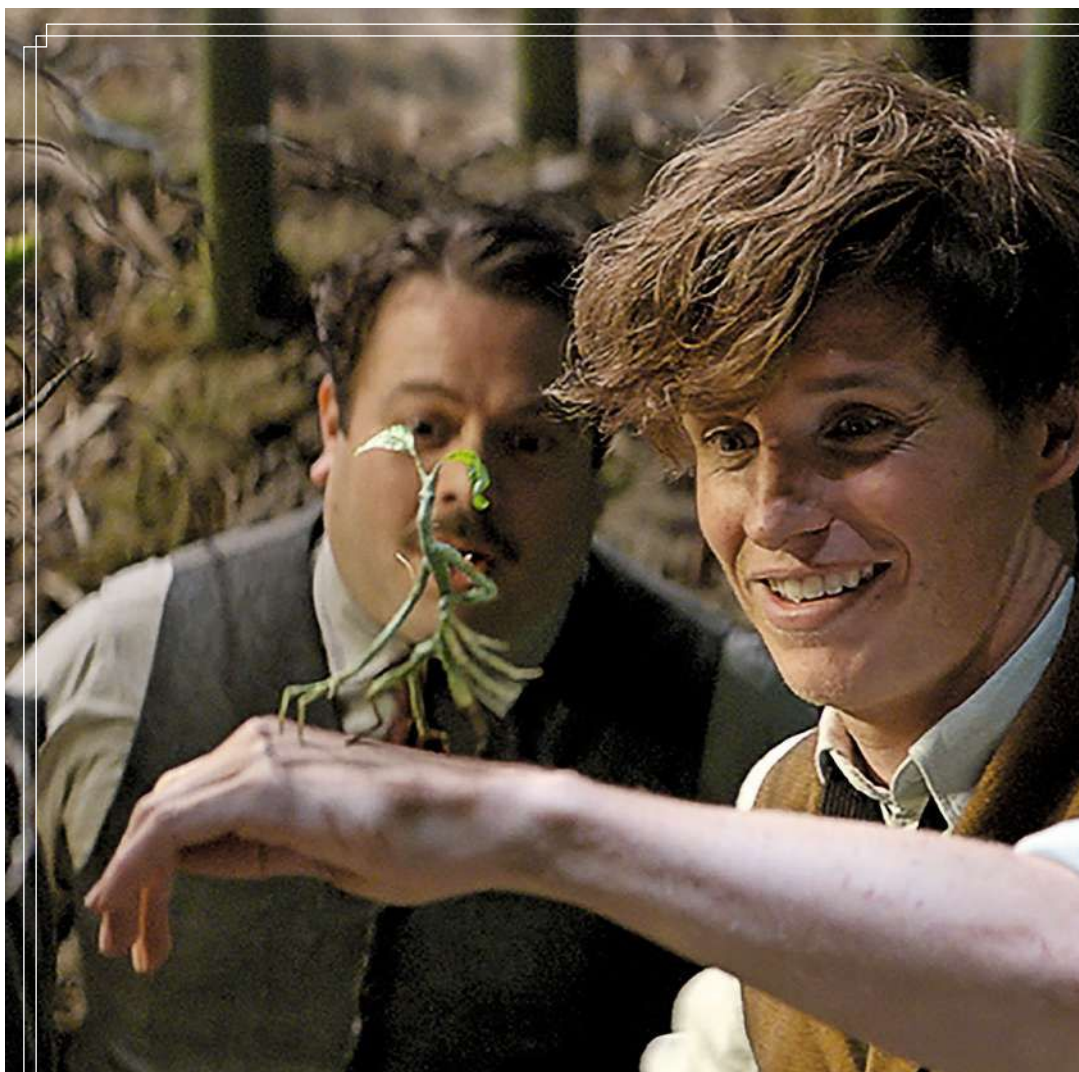


MAYBE, JUST MAYBE, YOU'VE SEEN one yourself. A pink feather, twitching in a tree. A brown blur, wriggling down a beach. A pair of eyes, intently gazing at you from behind a rock. Then you blinked, and it was gone. Nothing left but the feeling you'd seen something way, way out of the ordinary.

"There are magical creatures everywhere," confirms David Yates cheerily. "Some of them live in the most remote places on the planet. Some are just very good at disguising themselves. One can actually make itself invisible. They're incredibly difficult to find."

Let's get one thing straight: Yates, the director of the final four *Harry Potter* films and this year's *The Legend Of Tarzan*, has not packed the whole thing in to play *Pokémon Go*. Instead, he's putting the final touches to his latest movie spectacular, a sorta-prequel to the *Potter* series that Floo-powders viewers back to New York in 1926. Vast in scale, packed with set-pieces and never-before-cast spells, it's a prospective franchise-launcher that looks certain to succeed. Yet it might not have happened at all.

Back in 2001, eight months before the release of that other franchise-launcher, *Harry Potter And The Philosopher's Stone*, J.K. Rowling published two spin-off books, *Quidditch Through The Ages* and, most pertinent at this moment, *Fantastic Beasts And Where To Find Them*. Its royalties going to Comic Relief, *Fantastic Beasts* was a breezy tour of the magical animal kingdom in the form of a Hogwarts textbook owned by Harry, written by a man named Newt Scamander, with scribbles on it from familiar characters ("Write





on your own book, Hermione"). Enchantingly conceived and executed — the illustrations of the creatures were inked by Rowling herself — it was an amuse-bouche between wizardly main courses. And so it remained, until the last *Harry Potter* movie was released in 2011. Then, David Heyman got a call from fellow producer Lionel Wigram. "We were thinking about what else we could do in this universe," says Heyman. "And Lionel had an idea: was there a documentary to be made about Newt and his creatures?"

Think 'Beast In Show', a quirky faux-doc following a "magizoologist" as he treks the globe like a cross between David Attenborough and David Copperfield. Heyman and Wigram kicked around the idea, getting more and more

excited at the possibilities. Only when they approached Rowling did they realise they'd been thinking small. "Jo said, 'No, not a documentary,'" remembers Heyman. "But THIS." And she showed us something she'd already started writing."

The scope of the multi-film project she laid out that day made even the *Potter* series look boutique. Rather than confining the majority of its action to a school, albeit a magical and big one with moving staircases and sentient trees, *Fantastic Beasts And Where To Find Them* would burst into the Muggle metropolis of New York. And period New York at that, five years before the Empire State Building had even gone up.

The potential was huge, especially with Rowling offering to write the screenplays herself, something she had not done on *Harry Potter*. But the challenges were equally outsized.

A menagerie of wriggling, flying, occasionally shape-shifting beasts would have to be brought to life. The story would need a villain terrifying enough to replace He-Who-Can-Probably-Be-Named-Now-He's-Been-Avada-Kedavraed-Into-Oblivion. And the new films would have to find their way without the benefit of a set of novels to use as a road map.

"It was a completely blank canvas," says Yates. "But rather than being daunting to me, it was a wonderful opportunity to define the tone. While part of the same universe as *Potter*, it's a much more grown-up world. There's only one child character in the story. There are dark forces waiting in the wings. And this time the hero is not a schoolboy, but an adult."

Ah yes, the hero.

NEWTON 'NEWT' ARTEMIS Fido Scamander is in the Diamond District of New York, and he's in big trouble. Striding down the sidewalk, past a theatre marquee proudly billing something called 'Danica And Her Seven Amorous Captains: The New Musical Tale Of A Young Flapper', he casts furtive glances back over his shoulder. The vicinity is vibrant with life, Buick coupes and Hudson sedans whizzing past, pedestrians bustling in both directions. But it quickly becomes apparent who's flustering Newt: a number of sinister figures in long leather coats, rushing to catch him. Gulping, the young wizard reaches into one of the pockets of his eye-catching blue jacket. Something in there might just be of use...

Moments later, cut has been called and Eddie Redmayne is reaching into a different pocket to pull out a hankie. "I'm a phlegmy Newt," he grins, once he's given his nose a blow. It's January 2016, and while a superstorm named Jonas is blanketing the real New York in snow, here in fake New York (aka Leavesden Studios, outside Watford) it's 11 degrees and drizzly. "We've been shooting in these tunnels and I picked up a cold," Redmayne tells *Empire*. "I'm used to doing smaller-budget things, like *The Theory Of Everything* and *The Danish Girl*, which are eight weeks max. With something this massive, you definitely go through ups



Clockwise from top left: Director David Yates (centre) on set with the *Fantastic* Katherine Waterston and Eddie Redmayne; New York City, 1926-style; Newt Scamander (Redmayne) and Jacob Kowalski (Dan Fogler) marvel at the stick insect-like Bowtruckle.

and downs as far as health [is concerned].”

Redmayne did a stint, of course, as whisper-screaming alien Balem Abrasax in *Jupiter Ascending*. But this is his first lead role in a Hollywood biggie. “I actually auditioned to play [*Chamber Of Secrets* villain] Tom Riddle while I was at university,” he admits. “I properly failed and didn’t get a call back. Over the years I always hoped I might be cast as a member of the Weasley family — I’m colour blind but I’ve always been told there’s a tinge of red to my hair — but unfortunately not. A lot of my friends, like Domhnall Gleeson and Rob Pattinson, got their *Harry Potter* moment, but I never got mine.”

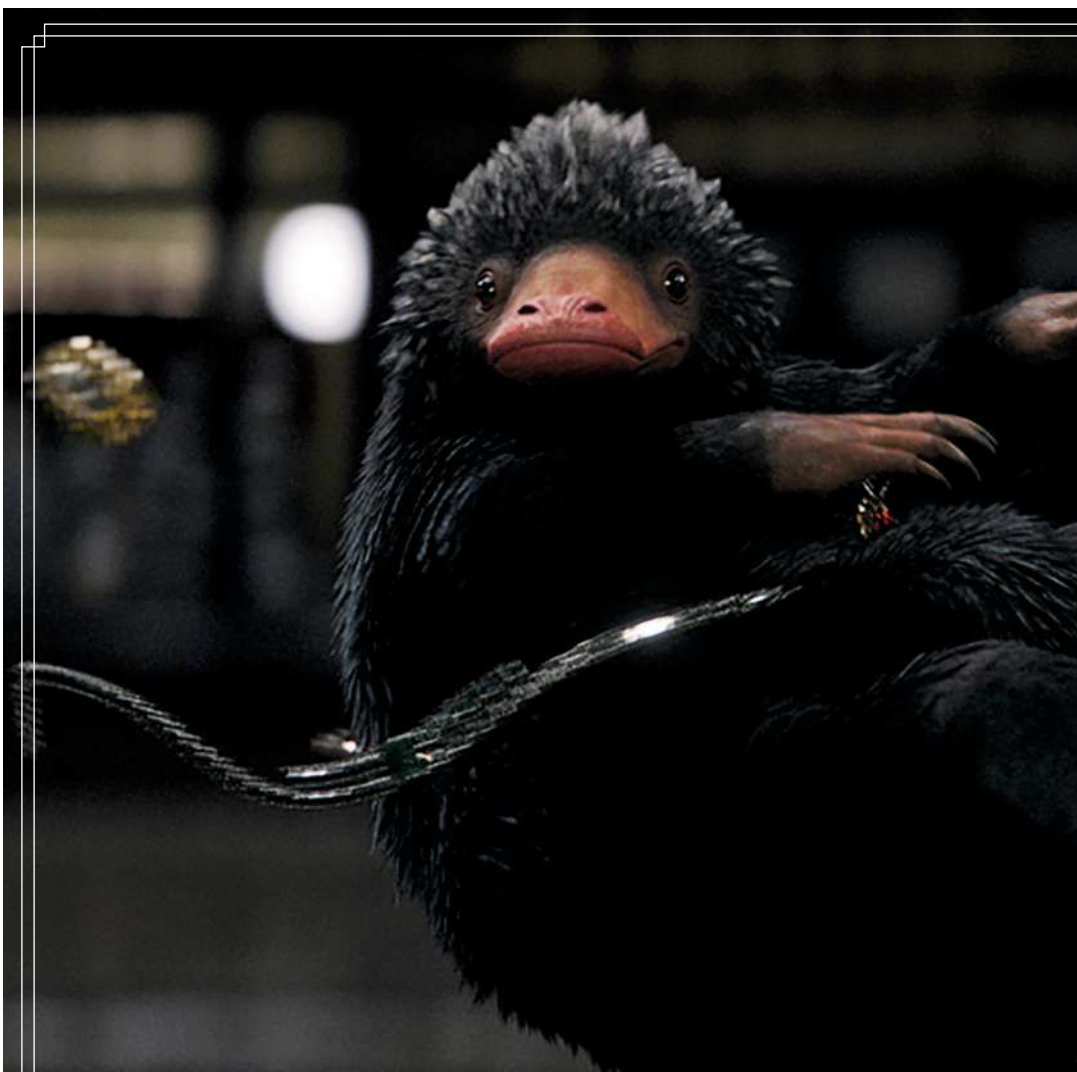
Instead, he’s getting something better: a Newt Scamander moment. The wizard is an oddball, in the best possible sense: a Hagrid-y fellow more comfortable with varmints than his own species. Redmayne, who was dismayed on an early film shoot to have liver pâté smeared behind his ear so a dog would lick his face, had to find his inner Chris Packham. He visited Howletts Wild Animal Park in Kent, mingling with Brazilian tapirs and dusky langurs. Then he went on a two-day tracking course in a forest. “I learned how you can add a bit of spit to a plant and make a remedy,” he thrills. “And how to step onto a twig very gently, without crunching it.”

Like fellow wild-man Crocodile Dundee, Newt must adjust to the hectic pace of life in New York. Unlike Crocodile Dundee, he comes bearing not a boomerang or absurdly large knife, but a magical suitcase, inside of which are exotic habitats teeming with beasts. Inevitably, this being an action movie, it’s not long before the latter escape to run riot around the city. Newt must not only hunt them down and get them back in the case, but elude capture himself by agents of MACUSA (the Magical Congress of the United States of America). Fortunately, like Harry before him, he has back-up: federal wand permit officer Tina Goldstein (Katherine Waterston), her glamorous and telepathic sister Queenie (Alison Sudol), plus baker Jacob Kowalski (Dan Fogler), the first major Muggle character in a JK Rowling movie.

“Actually, I’m a ‘No-Maj — short for ‘no-magic,’” corrects Fogler. “‘Muggles’ is a British term. I’m like Bottom in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, the regular, happy-go-lucky guy that gets to play with the fairies in the forest.”

The quartet of stars watched in wonder as the Big Apple was constructed around them, new façades springing up constantly around the mind-bogglingly massive, and massively detailed, street set. At times there have been 400 extras populating it, plus 41 antique cars. “Even horse crap!” marvels Waterston. “Yeah, baby. I thought it was fake, but it wasn’t. I didn’t learn the hard way by throwing it at anybody, but I came close.”

The aesthetic is Jazz Age with a Rowling twist. A magical speakeasy visited by our heroes,





called The Blind Pig, has a band featuring “goblin brass” and an upright grand piano. MACUSA headquarters, concealed by a spell within the Woolworth Building, has ‘Wanted’ posters on its walls for the likes of Al Capone-esque dark wizard Lancaster Pyke (crime: embezzlement of spells; reward: 4,850 dragols) and vicious witch Ernestina Abutor, aka the ‘Red Panther’ (“Bearing wand and extremely dangerous”).

A lavish outpouring of imagination, it’s impressive, no-expense-spared stuff: even the manholes on the street set blast real steam. But there are a few things conspicuous by their absence. Those fantastic beasts: where to find them?

THERE WAS NO shortage of actual wildlife on the *Harry Potter* sets. Besides the parliament of owls operating as unpaid postal workers, there was Scabbers the rat, Ripper the bulldog, even mean old moggie Mrs Norris. Despite the presence of a studio cat named Teddy (renamed ‘Teddy Redmayne’ for the duration of the shoot), *Fantastic Beasts And Where To Find Them* is a different story. You cannot, it seems, call up Birds And Animals and ask for a “swooping evil” or a “bits-and-pieces creature”. Well, you could, but they’d probably hang up.

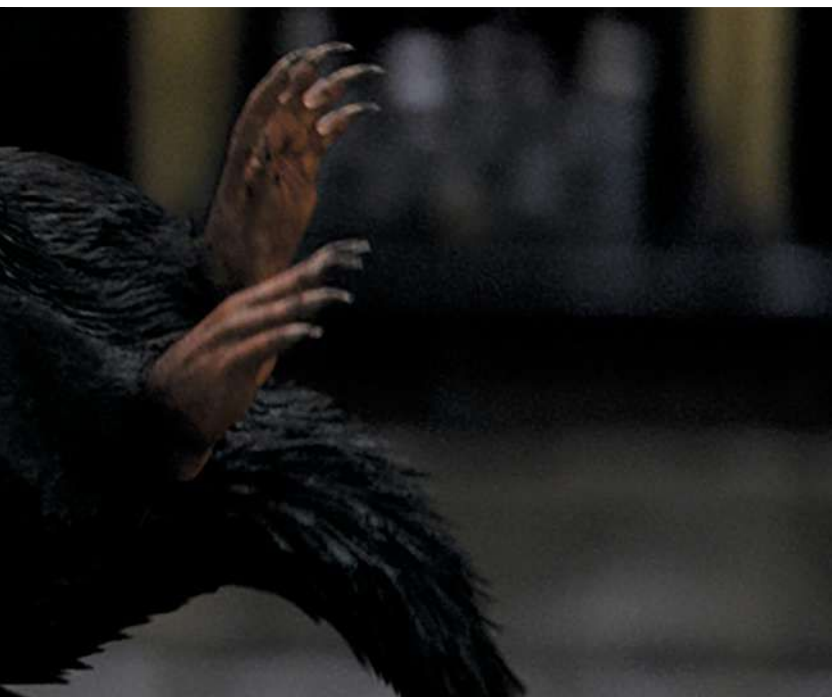
“When we started designing the creatures, we let our artists go crazy,” says David Heyman. “But ultimately we kept coming back to real things in nature, to find a different language than the pure fantasy language a lot of movie creatures have.” The Fwooper, a grumpy pink bird, was inspired by a documentary clip of an owl spinning its head around and shooting the camera a dirty look. The Erumpent is a 15-foot-tall, rhino-like quadruped. The Mooncalf looks like the ghost of a llama.

The task for Yates and his visual-effects team was to not only animate each one convincingly, but imbue it with a distinct personality. “The Occamy is a very sweet, wild creature that’s a baby, really, and needs to be nurtured,” says the director, becoming animated himself as he conjures one up in his mind. “There’s a wonderful thing called a Thunderbird, who is named Frank — he’s an ancient, regal creature who creates weather when he flies. There’s a strange and powerful force called an Obscurus, which is a darker part of the movie. And there’s the Niffler...”

Appearing in two *Harry Potter* novels but not hitherto seen in the cinematic universe, the Niffler is by all accounts the premier scene-stealer of *Fantastic Beasts*, the midpoint between a duck-billed platypus and Bill Murray. Yates calls him “an avaricious honey badger of sorts”. Redmayne calls him “ballsy”. A kleptomaniac, he’s fearless in his acquisition of shiny things, even stealing the buckles from people’s shoes. One key scene in the movie will set the furry scuttler free in a bank: coin-based mayhem ensues.

In Rowling’s book, there are 85 types of beast. The movie has whittled them down to a couple of dozen (odds on the mucus-producing, ditch-dwelling Flobberworm making the cut: 100-1), though several made a late resurgence. “The script evolved a lot,” says VFX supervisor Christian Manz. “Suddenly new creatures would appear two weeks before filming. There are so many: funny ones and scary ones and things that defy expectation.” Toy sales are likely to be strong for a few in particular, such as the Bowtruckle, which Redmayne describes as “an emotional, stick insect-like fellow, a bit clingy”. Or the Demiguise, that is, says Fogler, “a super-smart little primate with the strength of 20 men. A lot of kids are gonna want to have him.”

But there is a lot more going on in this story than just beast-collection. Sinister powers are ➤



Clockwise from top left: Colin Farrell as the shrewd Percival Graves, Director of Magical Security; The witch-hating Barebones family, led by mum Mary Lou (Samantha Morton, second from left) and adopted son Credence (Ezra Miller, second from right); The rodent-like Niffler, a big fan of shiny things.

BEST CASE SCENARIOS

HOW DOES NEWT'S WONDROUS SUITCASE STACK UP AGAINST THESE ICONIC PIECES OF LUGGAGE?



BREAKFAST AT TIFFANY'S (1961)

Holly Golightly (Audrey Hepburn) is unorthodox over storage: besides stashing her ballet slippers in the fridge, she keeps her telephone in a natty vellum suitcase. At least she doesn't put Cat in the sink.



TRUE ROMANCE (1993)

Tarantino used a briefcase as a MacGuffin in *Pulp Fiction*; for this he threw in, as Dick (Michael Rapaport) puts it, "a whole fucking suitcase full of cocaine!" Alas, it ends up riddled with bullets. Poor suitcase.



OLDBOY (2003)

It's a nightmare to lose a suitcase, but worse to wake up inside one, as Oh Dae-su (Choi Min-sik) learns in Park Chan-wook's revenge chiller. So iconic is the moment, the Josh Brolin remake put it on the poster.



THE DARJEELING LIMITED (2007)

Perhaps cinema's most coveted carry-ons, this safari-printed Louis Vuitton set was made especially for Wes Anderson's film. As of last year you can buy your own replica online, thanks to super-fan Alberto Favaretto.



PADDINGTON (2014)

The UK Border Force would have a field day with Paddington if they got hold of his marmalade-stuffed valise. Fortunately he sneaks in by ship, avoiding interrogation and possible cavity search.





at work in the big city. Powers so sinister, in fact, that Newt might just need a super-smart little primate with the strength of 20 men.

THERE'S A DANCE that often occurs during an interview about a major upcoming movie. The journalist probes for plot intel; the actor jokes they'll be shot by a sniper if they give it up. Ezra Miller does not do that dance. "Everything I say will be evasive bullshit," he declares, before we've even said hello. "What's so great about this interview is that I literally can't answer any of your questions. And I want you to print that."

The 24-year-old star won't state his character Credence's surname (later announced

as Barebone). And he doesn't bite when we invite him to add a third adjective to the two ("troubled", "mysterious") already on Credence's Wikipedia page. "I wouldn't want to drop a synonym into the bucket," he stonewalls magnificently. "I feel like it's good where it's at."

David Yates does confirm to *Empire* that a new über-villain is rising: "There is a character who we meet in this movie, but who will come to the fore much more in the second one... One of the scariest aspects he has is this amazing ability to seduce with his ideas." So all this makes one wonder: is Credence the new Voldemort? Well, maybe, but there are other possibilities in the mix, such as the witch-hunting members of the New Salem Philanthropic Society, or Senator Henry Shaw Jr (Josh Cowdery), a rabble-rousing politician running for the White House. "The 1920s are a weird parallel to where we're at now," says Yates of the obvious connection between Shaw and the Orange-Hued-2016-US-Presidential-Candidate-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. "Just this fizzy champagne bottle of a world with all this excess, but teetering on the edge of some great collapse, economically and ideologically. And waiting in the wings are malicious forces hoping to come in and capitalise on that."

If the seeds are all in place for an ongoing, darkening saga, only one person really knows what's coming. J.K. Rowling has been more hands-on with this adaptation than previous ones: the design of the MACUSA building's interior was reconfigured after she suggested it incorporate more Gothic architecture. But the novelist-turned-screenwriter has still been relatively reclusive, rarely appearing on set and keeping even the producers in the dark about certain things. "It's actually really exciting to be working on something where you don't know the full story," says David Heyman. Miller has a more colourful way of describing the process of working with the *Fantastic Beasts* mastermind: "She just sits on a big old dragon's egg of info that stirs from somewhere deeper than her mind. And I'm revelling in getting little peeks of the dragon's egg under her mighty weight."

What we do know is that the already-underway sequel will travel to Paris. And it will be as colossal as a Ukrainian Ironbelly dragon (*Fantastic Beasts And Where To Find Them*, p25). "It's quite ambitious," understates Yates, who is set to return alongside the likes of production designer Stuart Craig, cinematographer Philippe Rousselot and costume designer Colleen Atwood. "Stuart is unflappable and indefatigable, but when he saw the script for *Beasts 2*, he said, 'Let me just think about it for a minute...'"

Leprechauns in the Louvre? Sea Serpents in the Seine? Anything's possible. Maybe even a Flobberworm. 🐛



Clockwise from top left: Newt and No-Maj baker Jacob run into difficulties; Carmen Ejogo as the formidable Seraphina Picquery, President of MACUSA; Witch sisters Tina (Waterston) and Queenie (Alison Sudol) Goldstein.

ALLSTAR: BFI, COLLECTION CHRISTOPHEL / ARENAPAL

FANTASTIC BEASTS AND WHERE TO FIND THEM IS IN CINEMAS FROM 18 NOVEMBER

THE 30 GREATEST HARRY POTTER CHARACTERS





**WE ASKED AND YOU VOTED
– HERE ARE THE WIZARDS,
MUGGLES AND CRITTERS THAT
PUT THE BIGGEST SPELL ON YOU**

WORDS NICK DE SEMLYEN, JAMES DYER, CHRIS HEWITT, HELEN O'HARA, JONATHAN PILE



30 THE SORTING HAT

⌚ Screenshot: 3 mins

The finest sentient head-topper in the *Harry Potter* universe, the Sorting Hat is, it seems, also indirectly responsible for many of the troubles in the wizarding world, placing the most-likely-to-be-evil students in dorms together to scheme wicked deeds. Then again, he did help Harry Potter defeat the Basilisk in *Chamber Of Secrets*.

Fantastic fact: J.K. Rowling originally considered sorting students via talking statues of the four house founders.

29 LILY POTTER

⌚ Screenshot: 4 mins

As a result of having died horribly while Harry was a baby, Lily Potter (Geraldine Somerville) isn't blessed with a wealth of screentime. Still, that's hardly an obstacle when there are Pensieves, Resurrection Stones or Mirrors Of Erised lying around. While still alive, she stuck up for a friendless Snape and gave her life to save Harry from Voldemort, sending the Dark Lord (temporarily) packing in the process.

Fantastic fact: Teacher's pet that she was, Lily once gave Professor Slughorn a fish called Francis.

28 CEDRIC DIGGORY

⌚ Screenshot: 8 mins 30 secs

The best thing ever to come out of Hufflepuff, Robert Pattinson's Cedric would inspire envy if he weren't so likeable. Friendly with an infallible sense of fairness, Cedric formed a tentative bond with Harry even as they competed, and his death arguably shaped Harry more than any other.

Fantastic fact: Henry Cavill auditioned for Cedric and Edward in *Twilight*, only to lose both roles to Pattinson.

27 BUCKBEAK

⌚ Screenshot: 3 mins 45 secs

Circa 40BC, Virgil wrote of hippogriffs:

"What may we lovers not expect?/ Griffins now will mate with mares." Two thousand years on, we finally got to see the Roman poet's daydream on screen, in the form of mardy bird-horse Buckbeak. Lover of dead ferrets and hater of Malfoys, he's clearly a creature of taste.

Fantastic fact: There is a stork in Uganda which, like Buckbeak, must be bowed to on approach.

26 LUCIUS MALFOY

⌚ Screenshot: 15 mins 15 secs

From the moment we said hello to Jason Isaacs' sneering Lucius Malfoy in *Chamber Of Secrets*, he was a gloriously hissable villain. Isaacs'

triumph was in sketching depth into a caricature of evil over the next few films: the last time we see him, he has the haunted eyes of a man who'll never be able to escape his nightmares. **Fantastic fact:** Isaacs got to keep Malfoy's cane after the last film. He promptly lost it.

25 DOLORES UMBRIDGE

⌚ Screenshot: 16 mins

Imelda Staunton's simpering, kitten-loving Umbridge struts rather than slithers, and is a far more hateable character than Voldemort. Not many of us can claim to have met an evil wizard attempting to rule the world, but someone who so gleefully and cruelly abuses their authority is far more common. And so hateable.

Fantastic fact: After Rowling gave Umbridge the middle name Jane, she retconned Hermione's to Jean.

24 ARTHUR WEASLEY

⌚ Screenshot: 15 mins 45 secs

Mark Williams' Arthur is a pure-blood patriarch who enjoys spending time with his children, rather than whacking them with a snake-headed cane. Not just goodhearted but astonishingly fertile — he and wife Molly have to remember seven birthdays — he juggles his homelife with a demanding job at the Ministry Of Magic.

Fantastic fact: Arthur was originally slated to die in *Order Of The Phoenix*, instead of Sirius Black.



23 GILDEROY LOCKHART

⌚ Screenshot: 32 mins 2 secs

Everyone's had a teacher like Gilderoy Lockhart. Flamboyant, eager to please, dying to show they're down with da kidz... and utterly useless. As the blowhard who breezes into Hogwarts with the swagger of a Rolling Stone and leaves a befuddled wreck, Kenneth Branagh is having a blast.

Fantastic fact: He was meant to appear briefly in *The Order Of The Phoenix*, as he does in the book, but was written out.

22 HEDWIG

⌚ Screenshot: 5 mins 15 secs

Harry's faithful snowy owl is a fantastic beast and no mistake. Her icy plumage and golden-yellow eyes alone make her the most memorable bird in the Hogwarts Owlery, but she's got it where it counts too. Forget her post-delivery skills, which make Amazon Prime look sluggish — Hedwig gives up her life to protect Harry in the Battle Of The Seven Potters.

Fantastic fact: In the wild, a snowy owl's favourite food is lemming.

21 NYMPHADORA TONKS

⌚ Screenshot: 5 mins

Nymphadora Tonks (Natalia Tena) is a crack Auror for the Ministry Of Magic and protégée to Mad-Eye Moody himself. She occasionally sported a snout or duckbill when the mood took her, but neither proved useful when she met an untimely end against Bellatrix Lestrange's wand. **Fantastic fact:** Her patronus changed from a jackrabbit to a wolf when she fell for Remus Lupin.

20 GINNY WEASLEY

⌚ Screenshot: 30 mins 15 secs

Bonnie Wright's Ginny is reserved to the point of silence, overlooked even at home amid the loudmouth jokers and hapless Ron. But look closely and it's clear that she's remarkably dependable, thanks at least in part to her experience of possession in *Chamber Of Secrets*. Unflappable and utterly steadfast in her commitment to Harry's cause, and Harry himself. **Fantastic fact:** Excels at the Bat-Bogey Hex, which causes bats to fly from the victim's nose.

19 ALASTOR 'MAD-EYE' MOODY

⌚ Screenshot: 3 mins 30 secs

He's moody and he has a mad eye. But chuckle at the world's most legendary Auror (Brendan Gleeson) at your peril. He's cinema's premium cycloptic badass: an indefatigable dark-wizard-catcher unafraid to leap headfirst into the fray. The fact he is at one point stuffed in a magical box by someone with the build of David Tennant is beside the point.

Fantastic fact: In the books, Moody's right eye is magical. In the films it's his left.





18 DRACO MALFOY

⌚ Screenshot: 31 mins 30 secs

The poster-child for some kind of magical Hitler Youth, Draco (Tom Felton) tormented Harry, Ron and Hermione for the duration of their tenure at Hogwarts, and we relished every minute of it. No-one spat the word “Potter!” quite like this malevolent occultist, nor terrorised Harry so effectively both on and off the Quidditch pitch.

Fantastic fact: Draco’s surname was, variously, Smart, Spinks and Spungen before Rowling settled on Malfoy.



17 MOLLY WEASLEY

⌚ Screenshot: 9 mins 45 secs

There are lots of reasons to love the Weasley matriarch (her skills in the kitchen, her crush on Gilderoy Lockhart, the howler she sent Ron after he crashed the flying car into the Whomping Willow), but the most iconic moment for Molly (Julie Walters) comes at the end of *The Deathly Hallows – Part 2* as she faces down Bellatrix Lestrange: “Not my daughter, you BITCH.” Quite.

Fantastic fact: Rosie O’Donnell once offered to play Molly Weasley for free.

16 VOLDEMORT

⌚ Screenshot: 37 mins 15 secs

If you spend three movies building up your big bad guy as the most despicable thing this side of a FIFA ethics committee, you’d better make damn sure that when he does finally show up, he delivers. Not a problem with You-Know-Who. Along came Ralph Fiennes in *The Goblet Of Fire*, with his distinctive chrome-dome, lack of nose (how does he smell? Terrible) and hissed invective, and we could all relax: evil was in good hands.

Fantastic fact: Richard Bremmer played the disembodied face of Voldemort in *The Philosopher’s Stone*.

15 GEORGE WEASLEY

⌚ Screenshot: 19 mins 30 secs

There’s a good chance that Fred Weasley beat his twin brother George in this vote because he died heroically, instead of merely having an ear blasted off. But Oliver Phelps’ George is just as warm, caring and funny as Fred, another surrogate older brother to Harry. He and Fred shield the younger kids — their gift of the Marauders Map to Harry saves more than one life — but they much prefer taking the mick out of everyone around them.

Fantastic fact: George once tried to send Harry a get-well-soon toilet seat.

14 BELLATRIX LESTRANGE

⌚ Screenshot: 10 mins 30 secs

For truly cackling, demented evil look no further than Helena Bonham-Carter’s Bellatrix Lestrange. She’s the sort of complete nutter who not only kills one of the series’ most beloved characters but skips around singing about it. The

Dark Lord’s right-hand woman and number one fan is a force of chaos — look at the hair-do — just barely held in check by her nose-free boss.

Fantastic fact: The name Bellatrix comes from the Latin words for “beautiful” and “wars”.

13 FRED WEASLEY

⌚ Screenshot: 20 mins

Pipping George by two spots, Fred (James Phelps) is the more impulsive of the two — often quicker to initiate the pair’s jokes, pranks and zany schemes. He’s also the more dead of the two, meeting his end via an explosion outside the Room Of Requirement in the Battle Of Hogwarts. Which, while not ideal for him, certainly helps his legend.

Fantastic fact: Rowling revealed on Twitter last year that Fred is the older of the twins.

12 DOBBY

⌚ Screenshot: 11 mins 15 secs

Despite being a sack-wearing, self-flagellating skivvy with a face like a melting candle, the Malfoys’ droopy-eared stair-scrubber is the saga’s most selfless hero. Shrugging off the ‘sock of bondage’, he earns his freedom, only to give it all up in one final courageous act, thrusting his flimsy frame between Harry’s back and Bellatrix Lestrange’s knife. The series’ biggest tear-jerker.

Fantastic fact: Dobby can both apparate and levitate objects — all without a wand.



11 NEVILLE LONGBOTTOM

⌚ Screenshot: 28 mins 15 secs

But for Voldemort’s (mis)reading of prophecy, Neville Longbottom could have been the chosen one and hero of the *Harry Potter* series. That’s because, while he may be an initially unprepossessing figure, Matthew Lewis’ Neville has got it where it counts. He’s brave, steadfast and surprisingly tough when faced with, say, a giant snake, and he does it all without Potter’s vast support network.

Fantastic fact: Lewis had to wear a fat suit and false teeth for most of his appearances as Neville.

10 MINERVA MCGONAGALL

⌚ Screenshot: 28 mins 45 secs

Even if she’d done nothing else of note, McGonagall should be celebrated simply for her battles in standing up to Dolores Umbridge. But, of course, she was so much more, evolving from the stern authority figure we first meet to reveal more human layers, including perhaps the sharpest wit of any character in the series.

Fantastic fact: Rowling says she always pictured Maggie Smith when writing McGonagall.

9 HAGRID

⌚ Screen time: 45 mins 45 secs

"Yer a wizard, 'Arry." Those four words, delivered by Robbie Coltrane in a West Country accent so thick it could clot cream, may be the most important in the entire *Potter* series. It's telling Rowling chose Hagrid, the lumbering, loveable man-mountain, to deliver them. Here was a character that evinced dependability and warmth from the off.

Fantastic fact: Hagrid's mother, Fridwulfa, was a giant. His dad was a human.

8 LUNA LOVEGOOD

⌚ Screen time: 17 mins 15 secs

Hogwarts' daffiest student provides many laughs: she reads upside-down books and bangs on about "blibbering humdingers". But Luna (Evanna Lynch) is far more than just a walking kook-dispenser. Due to her tragic backstory — her mother died experimenting with a spell when she was nine — she is the only student able to provide solace to Harry after Sirius is killed.

Fantastic fact: Luna's necklace is a butterbeer cork on a piece of string.

7 RON WEASLEY

⌚ Screen time: 211 mins 45 secs

The archetypal underdog, Rupert Grint's Ron is poor, ginger and academically unexceptional. Despite his shortcomings, Harry's eye-rolling consigliere more than proves his worth, nailing the one-liners and radiating an almost zen-like insouciance in the face of Death Eaters, Whomping Willows or explosive slug vomit. He's not the best and he's not the brightest, but he has the biggest heart. Plus he gets the girl.

Fantastic fact: Ron was based on a school friend of Rowling's named Sean Harris.



6 ALBUS DUMBLEDORE

⌚ Screen time: 77 mins 15 secs

They don't promote just anyone to Supreme Mugwump of the International Confederation Of Wizards, let alone Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot, yet these were but two of the many accolades bestowed upon Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore. Part surrogate father, part inscrutably riddlesome sage, Dumbledore (Richard Harris, then Michael Gambon) was hailed as the greatest headmaster in Hogwarts history, sacrificing career advancement, family and ultimately his life, all in the name of his beloved school.

Fantastic fact: When not wizarding, Albus' hobbies included ten-pin bowling.

5 HARRY POTTER

⌚ Screen time: 539 mins 15 secs

Our hero, yet only fifth on the list, Daniel Radcliffe's Harry suffers the traditional protagonist's fate of having to carry the story, while others get to pop up, say something memorably funny or evil, then go away again while he's stuck doing occlumency lessons. Perhaps he deserves better.

Fantastic fact: His birthday is 31 July, the same as Rowling's.



4 REMUS LUPIN

⌚ Screen time: 26 mins

After two films in which Harry's Defence Against The Dark Arts teachers turned out to be a) evil and b) an idiot, things looked up with the introduction of David Thewlis' warm, wise, witty Remus Lupin. Here, at last, was a role model from whom Harry could learn and draw inspiration, as long as he didn't turn out to secretly be a werewolf. Ah, dashed bad luck.

Fantastic fact: Remus and Nymphadora Tonks' son, Teddy, was cut from *The Deathly Hallows — Part 2*.

3 SIRIUS BLACK

⌚ Screen time: 20 mins 45 secs

He's a wizard. He's played by Gary Oldman. Isn't that enough? In case not, let us refer you to Sirius Black's magical mugshot, a loop of Oldman screaming and laughing insanely (given he's completely rational when we meet him, this doesn't make a lot of sense, but don't quibble). Without doubt the coolest character in the entire series, Harry Potter's godfather can transform into a dog and rides a hippogriff. Now *that's* Black magic.

Fantastic fact: His prison tattoos are actually spells to protect him.

2 HERMIONE GRANGER

⌚ Screen time: 205 mins

Both Rowling and screenwriter Steve Kloves call Hermione their favourite character, and it's hard to argue. Harry couldn't have survived his first year without her: she's the brains of the operation, unravelling clues like a miniature Marple and familiar with more spellcraft than ten average wizards. But Emma Watson's Hermione doesn't get enough credit for her razor-sharp sense of humour, or her growth from a slightly priggish youngster into a wiser and more generous heroine.

Fantastic fact: Hermione ultimately becomes Minister Of Magic.



⌚ Screen time: 43 mins 15 secs

"Can I swear in this?" asks Daniel Radcliffe upon hearing the identity of *Empire* readers' favourite character. Cover your ears, Potter fans. "Fuck's sake! Yeah, yeah, Snape made a big sacrifice, but come on, guys! The films are called *Harry Potter*! Harry is top five? Top five? This is an outrage!"

Fortunately, it turns out the storm of indignation is just for show. "It was such a wonderful mystery — wondering if this guy is good or bad — that had people going for years," he says of Snape. "He's a character that stepped directly out of people's imaginations. Exactly as you would picture Snape, there was Alan."

There he was, indeed. The chalk-white face, framed by lank, dark hair that would have been the envy of any Stone Roses fan; the languorous purr of a voice; the sneering pout that formed on his lips every time he had to say the word "Potter". From the beginning, whenever Snape was harsh and cruel, persecuting Harry for seemingly no good reason, Alan Rickman infused the vulturine teacher with a droll wit that leavened the sadism. He brought layers of emotion to a character that could have been one-note.

As the ambition of JK Rowling's story increased, so too did the depths afforded Snape. The emotional impact of his dying moments and then the extended trawl through his Pensieve memories, revealing the true extent of his undercover work and his unrequited love for Lily Potter, cannot be overstated. The transmutation of Snape from fiend into tragic hero is the greatest arc of any character in the Potterverse. And while Rowling, writer Steve Kloves and mainstay director David Yates can, and should, take credit, the majority goes to Rickman. Watch his performance across all eight movies and it's a reminder of his titanic talent in the year he was taken from us. "I don't mind getting beaten by Snape," admits Radcliffe. "I'm very happy with coming behind Alan Rickman."

Fantastic fact: Snape was born in the fictional Midlands town of Cokeworth.



BOTTOM OF THE CLASS



THE *POTTER*
CHARACTERS
WHO GOT JUST
ONE VOTE EACH



Alicia Spinnet

Chaser on Gryffindor's Quidditch team. Not to be confused with a spinet: a small upright piano.

Cornelius Fudge

Pompous, pipe-smoking, Death-Eater-appeasing. The Neville Chamberlain of the magical world.

Daphne Greengrass

Slytherin schoolgirl with blonde hair and a perma-sneer. No relation to Paul Greengrass.

Errol the Owl

Resembles a moulting feather duster. Delivers post erratically.

Petunia Dursley

Harry Potter's purse-lipped guardian. Neat and tidy, but otherwise entirely awful.

King's Cross Station Guard

In the dark as to Platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$, but can point you towards West Cornwall Pasty Co.

Pansy Parkinson

Magic-wielding mean girl who rules Slytherin. Played by three actresses throughout the series.

Poppy Pomfrey

Hogwarts school nurse. Nifty with a magical Band-Aid.

Albus Potter

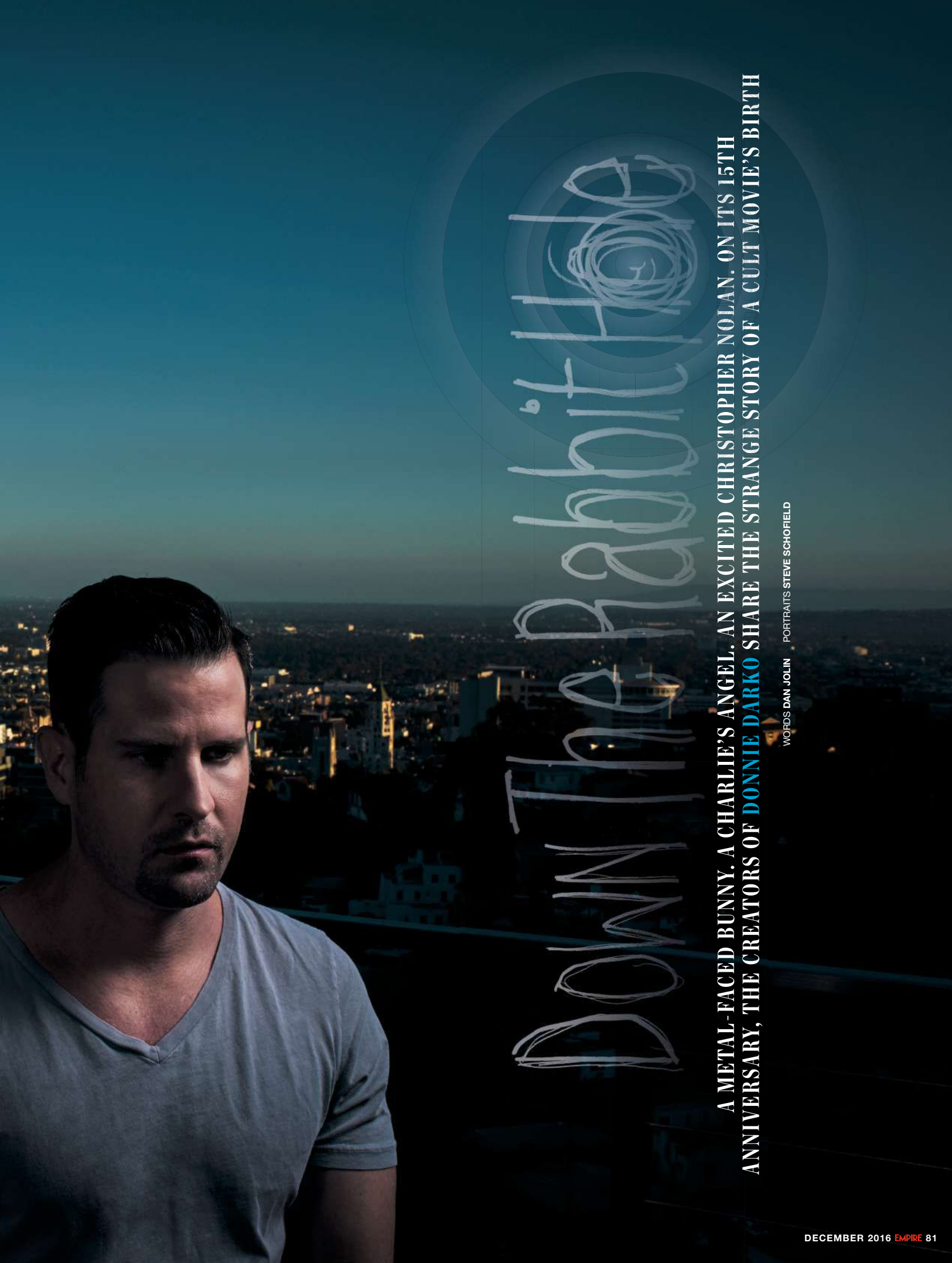
Harry's second son, named in memory of Albus Dumbledore. You can call him Al.

Bloody Baron

Slytherin house ghost. That blood once belonged to his wife, Helena Ravenclaw.



Richard Kelly and Frank,
photographed exclusively
for *Empire* in Los Angeles,
on 15 September 2016.



Down the Rabbit Hole

A METAL-FACED BUNNY. A CHARLIE'S ANGEL. AN EXCITED CHRISTOPHER NOLAN. ON ITS 15TH ANNIVERSARY, THE CREATORS OF **DONNIE DARKO** SHARE THE STRANGE STORY OF A CULT MOVIE'S BIRTH

WORDS DAN JOLIN PORTRAITS STEVE SCHOFIELD

IT WAS MAY 2002,

just seven months after his debut movie had died horribly, when Richard Kelly found himself on East 3rd Street in New York. He was lost in thought, still pondering how the metaphysical, science-fiction high-school drama *Donnie Darko*, over which he'd toiled and fought bitterly for years, could have flopped so badly the previous Halloween. Then, as he passed a pizza joint named Two Boots on the corner of Avenue A, he saw a familiar face. The long-eared, metallic, smiling-skull visage of Frank the bunny stared at Kelly from the restaurant window.

Curious, Kelly stepped inside. "Why do you have my movie poster up?" he asked. Two Boots, it turned out, was affiliated with the single-screen Pioneer Theater next door. "We're playing your movie every Saturday at midnight," the manager told him. "It's sold out three Saturdays in a row."

The following Saturday, Kelly pitched up at 2am for a post-screening Q&A. What he saw overwhelmed him with emotion: not just a packed room but, he recalls now, "reporters with cameras, and [columnist] Michael Musto from *The Village Voice*". Kelly chuckles at the memory. "It made me realise that maybe the movie was gonna have a second wind."

That wind has never stopped blowing for *Donnie Darko*. In fact, when *Empire* speaks to the 40-year-old, he's outside a digital suite on the Sony lot in LA, about to supervise a super-high-resolution 4K version of the film for a "huge multi-disc box set", out on 12 December. His passion for the project hasn't waned. "You live with your films for the rest of your life," he says. "In a way, they are like a spouse, but you can't get divorced from them 'cause they're like a part of your DNA. They either haunt you or bless you, but they are always with you."

It's fair to say that this troublesome, misunderstood 15-year-old of a film has haunted and blessed Kelly in equal measure.

"NORMAL" AND "FUNCTIONAL" is how Richard Kelly describes his suburban childhood in Newport News, Virginia. So *Donnie Darko* emerged less from any darkness in his own life than his love of Stephen King novels, and the movies of Steven Spielberg and David Lynch.

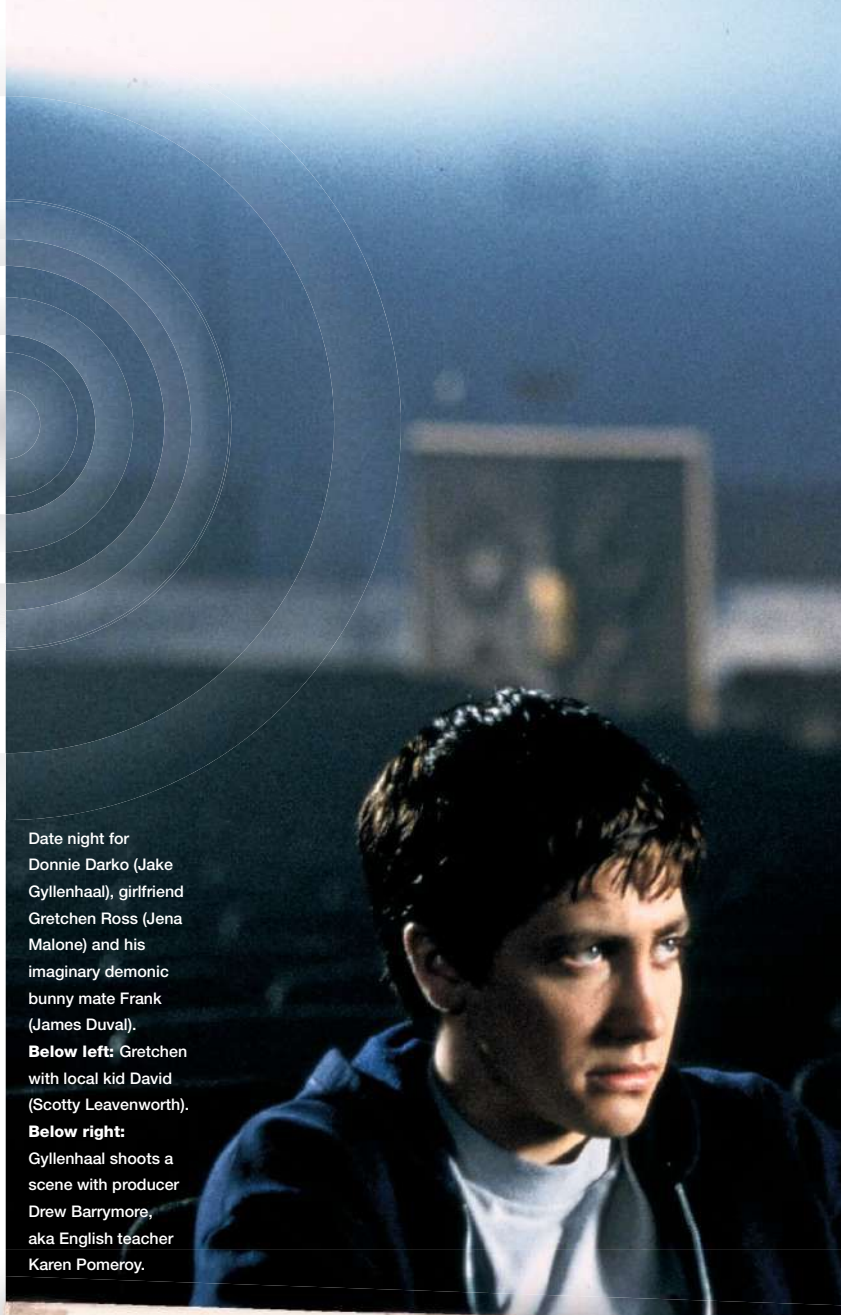
Soon after graduating from film school in 1997, Kelly resolved to write and direct his first feature script. Inspired by a reminiscence of a kid from his hometown who'd had a chunk of ice plummet into his bedroom from a passing jet plane, he dived into "a teenage superhero journey", which would also tackle "the end of the Reagan era" and weave in his own high-school experiences. "It poured out of me," he says. "The first draft was done in four weeks."

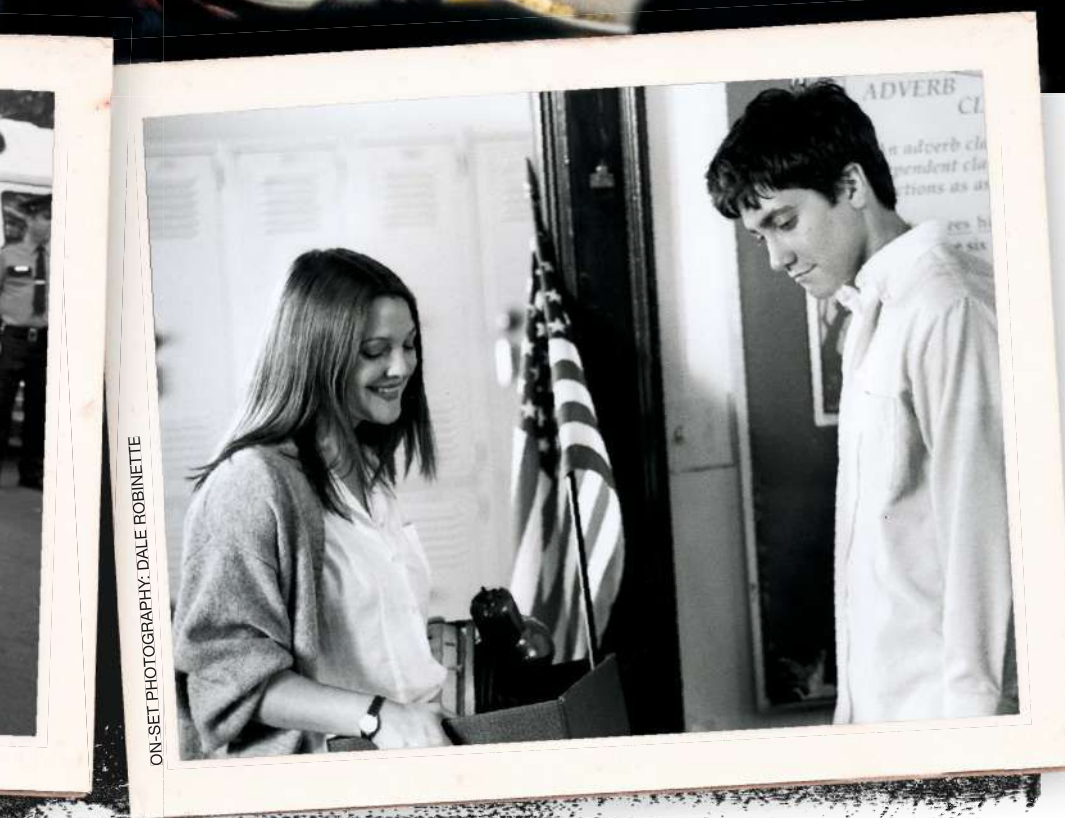
The chunk of ice mutated into a mysterious, falling jet engine, and the kid from his hometown became *Donnie Darko*, a somnambulant 16-year-old who, on 2 October 1988, is lured from his bed by a six-foot-tall demonic rabbit named Frank. The world is going to end in 28 days, Frank declares, and only Donnie can stop it. While on this quest, he will fall in love, uncover a local self-help guru as a paedophile, discover the mechanisms of time-travel and make an impassioned speech about the sexual practices of the Smurfs.

Date night for Donnie Darko (Jake Gyllenhaal), girlfriend Gretchen Ross (Jena Malone) and his imaginary demonic bunny mate Frank (James Duval).

Below left: Gretchen with local kid David (Scotty Leavenworth).

Below right: Gyllenhaal shoots a scene with producer Drew Barrymore, aka English teacher Karen Pomeroy.





ON-SET PHOTOGRAPHY: DALE ROBINETTE

Kelly's producer Sean McKittrick, who worked with him on his graduate film *Visceral Matter* and was at the time interning at New Line Cinema, was deeply impressed. "It was one of the most wildly imaginative stories I've read," he says. "I mean, it was Philip K Dick again." He was not alone. On the strength of *Donnie Darko*, Kelly was signed up by big Hollywood agency CAA, and just two years after graduation, he and McKittrick found themselves taking meetings all over town.

That's when the first battle for *Donnie Darko* began.

"IT WAS A frustrating year," says Kelly. "I met a lot of very powerful producers and the unanimous feedback was, 'This is a really great writing sample, but it's unproducible. It's too crazy. It's too ambitious. And you're too young.'"

Kelly and McKittrick were told it should be set in the modern day. They were told to make it a straight horror film. Above all, they were told Kelly shouldn't direct it himself. But he refused to let anyone else take it on. "I was just a stubborn little sonuvabitch!" he laughs.

In the end, it took the intervention of an angel to get the film made. Specifically, a Charlie's Angel. In March 2000, Drew Barrymore was in the midst of shooting the \$100 million action caper when her Flower Films producing partner, Nancy Juvonen, shoved Kelly's script into her hand and said, "You have to read this and you have to do it right away." Two days later, McKittrick and Kelly were in downtown LA, on the set of *Charlie's Angels*. "Cameron Diaz was hanging out in front of Drew's trailer," says Kelly. "We walked in, and Drew was reading the script. She was like, 'This is wild. I love this. What do you wanna do?'"

Although the character of disillusioned English teacher Karen Pomeroy had been conceived as a woman in her forties, Kelly asked if Barrymore would like to play her. She did, but only if he let her company produce it. With a laugh, McKittrick recalls saying, "Yeah, please. Please help!" The deal was done in the room.

By August, *Donnie Darko* was finally shooting, with a budget of \$4.5 million. The cast had come together in a flurry. "Once we got Drew, that opened a lot of doors," Kelly says. "She was a magnet for the talent." Katharine Ross took the role of Donnie's therapist; Mary McDonnell played Rose Darko, Donnie's elegantly suffering mother. McDonnell's *Independence Day* co-star James Duval was given the role of Frank, and Jena Malone, who'd played the young Jodie Foster in *Contact*, was cast as Gretchen, Donnie's girlfriend. Most impressively, Patrick Swayze agreed to take the small part of Jim Cunningham, who appears in the film's hilarious self-help infomercials and is later revealed to own a "kiddie-porn dungeon".

"I think he was really nervous to do it," says Kelly, "but he wanted to reinvent himself and do something edgy. I was asking a lot of these actors to take big risks. Not least the lead role, asking someone to play this schizophrenic character

Frank, shot at the home of Bill Condon.

Top right: A 19-year-old Jake Gyllenhaal gets a touch-up between takes on set.

Middle right: The family Darko have a break during filming: Mary McDonnell (mum Rose), Daveigh Chase (younger sister Samantha), Holmes Osborne (dad Eddie), Maggie Gyllenhaal (older sister Elizabeth) and Jake Gyllenhaal (Donnie).

Bottom right: Noah Wyle gets into character as Donnie's science teacher Prof Kenneth Monnitoff.





who sees a giant rabbit. But with great risks come great rewards."

Rushmore breakout star Jason Schwartzman had been lined up to play Donnie, but dropped out due to scheduling difficulties. Into the new round of auditions walked Jake Gyllenhaal, 19 years old and fresh from Joe Johnson's family drama *October Sky*. "Jake said maybe two lines," says McKittrick, "and within a minute Richard and I just looked at each other. Like, 'Whoa, this is the guy.'"

Gyllenhaal admits to being surprised by Donnie's creator. "I thought Richard would be some sort of goth-like character," he laughs, "but he was really just a frat boy. Still, the whole journey of this movie is packed with contradictions. The only straightforward thing was that my real sister played my sister." (Jake's sibling Maggie appears as Elizabeth Darko.)

When we speak, Gyllenhaal is driving home after a long day's shoot at Shepperton Studios on Daniel Espinosa's sci-fi thriller *Life*. Despite his exhaustion, he talks about his *Donnie Darko* experience energetically, whether recalling how they had to re-shoot the first day because of a faulty shutter on the Steadicam, or marvelling at how damn fast they had to work. "We block-shot most of the movie," he says, relating how they filmed every Darko dinner-table scene in just a few hours, changing clothes and make-up between takes. "It was *mad*," he says, "but absolutely in the spirit of the movie." Gyllenhaal also fondly remembers Patrick Swayze arriving on set every day "on a motorised scooter", even when Swayze had nothing to shoot. Adds Jena Malone, "He would come in and just hang out, which was just the sweetest thing."

Things weren't quite so relaxed for Kelly. He may have had veteran cinematographer Steven Poster (*Rocky V*) in his corner, but he remembers "people were very nervous that I had bitten off more than I could chew". The film's signature set-piece — a virtuoso, dialogue-free Steadicam glide through the high school to Tears For Fears' *Head Over Heels* — nearly didn't happen at all. "There was a lot of pushback. They were like, 'You don't need this. It's a music video.' Honestly, they were kinda furious with me." Kelly shot it anyway. Despite the anxiety, the intensity of the work and the sheer technical ambition, the shoot wrapped on schedule, and within budget, in 28 days. "I was like, 'Okay... we did it,'" says Kelly.

That's when the second battle for *Donnie Darko* began.

BY HIS OWN admission, Richard Kelly's movies always run long. "I add scenes, I allow improv, I do additional camera set-ups," he sighs. "I just wanna get it in the vault, right?"

Juvonen recalls the *Donnie Darko* editing process as being "painfully painstaking". Kelly's defence is that the movie was "an algebra theorem" that would stop making sense if you took out even one small element. "Then you have financiers who just don't understand the theorem, and they're just like, 'We don't fucking care — just make it 100 minutes long or we're taking it away from you.'"

By the time the Sundance Film Festival came around in January 2001, he had a version just shy of two-and-a-half hours. Juvonen was convinced they were going to be "the belle of the ball". Surely such an ambitious independent film, which even had elaborate and convincing visual effects, would find a distributor? "But that screening did not go as well as we thought."

James Duval remembers an audience member getting up and announcing, "That is the worst movie here at Sundance! It's a horrible movie!" McKittrick thinks the VFX caused people to treat it as a non-independent movie, a cheat that shouldn't have been screened there. "And because it wasn't well-received, we didn't have that many offers to buy it." It looked as if *Donnie Darko* would head straight to home video. "In 2001 that was the death of any movie," shudders the director. "We had to rescue this film from utter, complete destruction."

However, one distributor expressed interest, chiefly because it had experienced success in Britain with another unconventional, seemingly uncommercial film that had received its US premiere at Sundance that year. Namely, *Memento*. "Aaron Ryder, who was [executive] producing *Memento*, convinced his bosses at Newmarket to screen the film and he strategically brought along [*Memento* director] Christopher Nolan," says Kelly. Nolan raved about *Donnie Darko* and, as Kelly puts it, "convinced Newmarket to buy it. He helped rescue the film from oblivion." After

further, agonising months of trimming it down to 113 minutes to meet Newmarket's requirements, it was set to finally receive its theatrical release, on 26 October 2001.

"Then," says Kelly, "9/11 happened."

IT'S HARD TO gauge the exact degree to which the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001 wrecked *Donnie Darko*'s box office chances. Gyllenhaal points out the falling jet-engine element wasn't part of the movie's marketing, though he recognises it was "a very sensitive time". McKittrick says that, as a result of the attacks, "people really weren't going back to theatres at that point". The disappointing performance of *Zoolander*, which was released around the same time, would seem to back this up.

But there could have been other deterrents. With an advertising campaign that focused on the creepy Frank mask, it was easy to mistake it for a horror movie, something which bugs Duval to this day. "Frank the bunny isn't a horror character at all!" he exclaims. "He's just this sort of dark, twisted guardian angel." Malone simply feels the film's defiance of categorisation hurt it most: "It didn't fit into any of the distribution boxes. *Donnie Darko* was not a film of its time."

During its opening weekend, *Donnie Darko* took \$110,494. By the end of its theatrical run, it had scraped together just half-a-million dollars.

"It didn't come out with an initial bang," says Gyllenhaal. "But then it had a long, slow burn." This went far beyond the likes of *Two Boots* starting a midnight-movie revival. *Donnie Darko* proved a much bigger success on DVD after its release in March 2002, its proliferation assisted by fansites which obsessed over the details of the paradoxical time-loop structure. In the UK, it enjoyed a robust theatrical run after its release in late 2002, taking just over £1 million.

The film also had another weapon: its music. With no budget to hire an established composer, Kelly and his producers invited Michael Andrews, guitarist with The Greyboy Allstars, to write his first score. In so doing, he gave *Donnie Darko* its most enduring element: the downbeat, piano-driven cover version of Tears For Fears' 1983 electropop hit *Mad World*, which plays over the climactic montage of the characters waking on the morning of Donnie's death. "It just stuck like crazy," Andrews tells *Empire*. "And that was it. Movie magic!" Two-and-a-half years later, the song would be the Christmas number one in the UK, and its 'sad cover' influence dominates trailers today, from *The Great Gatsby* (*Back To Black*) to *Avengers: Age Of Ultron* (*No Strings On Me*). "People in the advertising world have told me it's become a verb," laughs Andrews. "To 'Mad World' a song..."

Yet *Donnie Darko*'s impact extends beyond the song. You can draw a line from Kelly's '80s-set, Spielberg/King-inspired suburban sci-fi to this year's *Stranger Things*. And it remains a film which encourages debate. "I designed it with a certain architecture to sustain multiple viewings," the director says. He also believes it's endured because, "There is an emotional undercurrent in it that speaks to anyone who feels like they're different, or as though they are misunderstood."

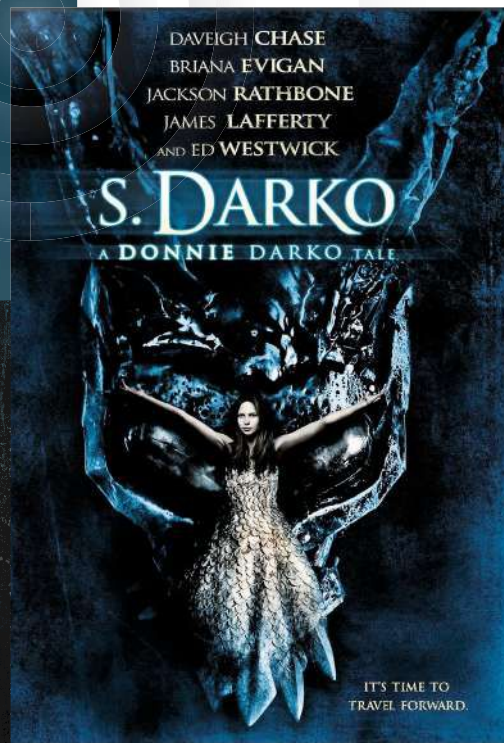
McKittrick puts the film's cult success down to the fact that, "It has such strong iconography. I remember being so excited that Frank the bunny ended up on *The Simpsons*. Barney was sitting at the bar and he looked to his left and there was a version of Frank next to him. It was like, 'Holy shit, we made *The Simpsons*!'"



"I'll take a large bag of carrots!"



Kelly with his malevolent lapin creation, plus original *The Philosophy Of Time Travel* prop. Middle and bottom left: Polaroids taken by Duval on set.



TWISTED SISTER

THE LAMENTABLE TALE OF THE DONNIE DARKO SEQUEL, *S. DARKO*

THE PLOT

Seven years after her brother's weird death, Donnie's younger sister, Samantha (Daveigh Chase), goes on a road trip with her best pal. After their car breaks down, Samantha starts sleepwalking and appearing in visions to a Gulf War veteran (James Lafferty), who narrowly misses being killed by a meteorite.

THE CREATORS

The 2009 film was directed by Chris Fisher and written by Nathan Atkins, the man behind *Deadly Descent: The Abominable Snowman*. Production company Silver Nitrate owned the rights, having put out *Donnie Darko* on DVD in the US. Richard Kelly had no involvement and says he was told, "You have no legal recourse to stop us."

THE CONNECTIONS

Fisher and Atkins brought back Chase to play the older Samantha, and clearly paid closer attention to Kelly's visual flourishes (a significant red car, a spinning-camera set-piece) than his actual ideas. At best, it can be seen as resembling a tin-eared tribute band.

THE REACTION

S. Darko went straight to DVD and was widely panned: "All style, no substance," said *The San Francisco Examiner*. Kelly flatly refuses to watch it. "It was absolutely repulsive, the way they handled it," he says. "I have nothing but contempt for the people that made that film. I will never see it for the rest of my life. I don't even like talking about it."

FRANK THE BUNNY has, over the past 15 years, ended up in quite a few different places. Juvonen has one of the surviving prop masks nickel-plated and mounted in her front room. Metallica's Kirk Hammett owns another Frank face. And a third can be found, along with the full furry costume, at the home of Bill Condon, director of next year's *Beauty And The Beast* live-action reboot, after his memorabilia-collecting partner Jack Morrissey bought it in an auction. It is with this third Frank that *Empire* will photograph Kelly a few hours after we speak on the Sony lot. We ask if he's looking forward to the reunion. He laughs. "Yeah. I'm gonna go and try and negotiate peace with him more than anything."

Of course, in the battles for *Donnie Darko*, Kelly's fight was never with Frank; the bunny's voice, he jokes, was always the voice in his head. Despite the fact he's only made two movies since (2006's *Southland Tales* and 2009's *The Box*), he doesn't sound embittered by the experience. Fortright and cheerful, during our conversation his mood only truly darkens once, when *Empire* brings up the unsanctioned sequel, *S. Darko* (see panel). Otherwise, he sees his setbacks as mere obstacles on a long journey. "This is a difficult business, but I've always tried to engineer my stories for the long haul. The true measure of any work of art is how it stands the test of time."

Morrissey and Condon's Frank, says Kelly, will soon be donated to the new Academy Museum in Los Angeles, and will be on display there once the building opens in spring 2018. He's come a long way since his first iteration, a Kelly pencil sketch drawn as he worked on the script. "A lot of people saw that sketch and were confused. They were like, 'Why is it so disturbing-looking?' So I'm really honoured he continues to transfix people." *Donnie Darko*: not so misunderstood after all. ●

BACK ON GLORIOUSLY UNHINGED FORM IN *DOG EAT DOG*,
NICOLAS CAGE TAKES US ON A WALK THROUGH HIS WILD SIDE

BACK ON GLORIOUSLY UNHINGED FORM IN *DOG EAT DOG*,
NICOLAS CAGE TAKES US ON A WALK THROUGH HIS WILD SIDE



WORDS NICK DE SEMLYEN
PHOTOGRAPHY FABRIZIO MALTESE
ILLUSTRATION OLIVER HIBERT

It's a *Dog Eat Dog* world: ex-cons Troy (Nicolas Cage) and Mad Dog (Willem Dafoe).



EVERYONE WHO'S WORKED with Nicolas Cage has a Nicolas Cage story. Justin Bartha, co-star of the *National Treasure* films, recalls a glorious, schnapps-fuelled dinner with Cage and Crispin Glover at LA's Madeo restaurant that went on and on and on. "Like going to a rock 'n' roll voodoo ceremony with a hilarious vampire wearing an orange crocodile jacket... and your skull's on fire," is how Bartha sums up the experience. Alison Lohman, Cage's con-job protégée in *Matchstick Men*, flashes back to a more sedate but equally memorable night aboard his private jet in 2003. "Sam Rockwell and I were talking when Nic came up and told us he was going to bed," she says. "He walked into the bathroom and five minutes later came out in full pyjamas with a night hat on. It was adorable."

But it's Mark Neveldine, who directed Cage in 2012's *Ghost Rider: Spirit Of Vengeance*, who has the anecdote to beat. Signed on to the sequel but yet to cross paths with its star, he and filmmaking partner Brian Taylor were dispatched to New Orleans for a meet-and-greet. The evening quickly spun out of control. "We were drinking pretty heavily and went to a metal show at a dive bar," says Neveldine. "At midnight, after too many rounds of liquor, I think the dark spirits inspired Nic to talk about a plot he'd purchased at an old cemetery. The next thing we knew, we were in a cab and then sticking 2x4s up against a fence so we could climb over."

Leaving the taxi waiting outside, the trio headed through the graveyard towards the pyramid mausoleum Cage built for himself in 2010: a majestic, nine-foot-tall stone edifice emblazoned with the Latin phrase "Omni Ab Uno" ("Everything From One"). Then a siren blared. "We got chased out by cops," Neveldine continues. "Nic and Brian went up the boards, but one broke when I stepped on it, so I had to parkour my way over the fence as our cab was peeling out. It was beyond surreal. But Nic made us feel like everything was gonna be fine. He was so superhero about it."

For anybody else, this would surely be a remarkable night. But when *Empire* speaks to Cage himself in early October, we have to jog his memory. "Gosh, could you elaborate a little bit?" he requests, presumably having been chased through tombstones by cops on more than one occasion. Post-elaboration, he gives a droll chuckle. "Oh right, yeah. We hopped the fence and looked at the tomb. I remember it was after hours. You can't do that anymore: the whole thing is sealed off now."

When you're Nicolas Cage, crazy things happen. During the making of *Bringing Out The Dead*, he was stalked by a mime. He has camped overnight, alone, in the ruins of Dracula's castle in Transylvania. Until recently, he resided in a mansion said to be haunted by 19th century serial killer Delphine LaLaurie. In Hollywood,



There's Method to his madness: Cage as Peter Leow in 1997's *Vampire's Kiss*.



Getting into the swing of things in *Birdy* (1984) as Vietnam vet Al Columbati.



Things get explosive for Cage as Johnny Blaze in 2011's *Ghost Rider: Spirit of Vengeance*.



a place populated by larger-than-life characters, he has been for some time the largest-living. And, as his new film *Dog Eat Dog* amply demonstrates, the extremes of his life are still reflected by the trajectory of his career. After several decades at the top, Cage remains a fascinating, unpredictable force of nature.

Just try telling that to him, though. "My life is regular," insists the man who once paid \$276,000 for a Mongolian dinosaur skull. "I have exciting moments. But there are far more days that are mundane and gentle and quiet."

One evening in 1982, a man blew smoke in Cage's face. The incident was to change the course of his life forever. "I was selling popcorn and candy at the concession stand at the Fairfax Theater," remembers the star. "It was the only job I ever had that wasn't acting, and it was a good job. But one day my boss came up and said, 'Someone's smoking in the theatre. Tell them to put it out.'"

Just 18 at the time and called Nicolas Coppola — his famous relations include Francis Ford (uncle) and Sofia (cousin) — he had tried his hand at the family business, appearing in a few scenes in *Fast Times At Ridgemont High*. But when most of his already-brief performance as 'Brad's Bud' was cut, he'd retreated to the Fairfax, where he could dwell in the darkness, watching movies for free. Then a cigarette ruined it all. "I walked up to the customer, a guy with a moustache who was there with some girl, and said, 'Sir, you gotta extinguish that,'" says Cage. "He took one big puff and unloaded it at me. I just looked at him, like, 'Are you kidding me?' And then I realised, 'I've had enough of this. I can't do it.' So I quit."

It was a moment that galvanised him. He changed his surname to that of his beloved

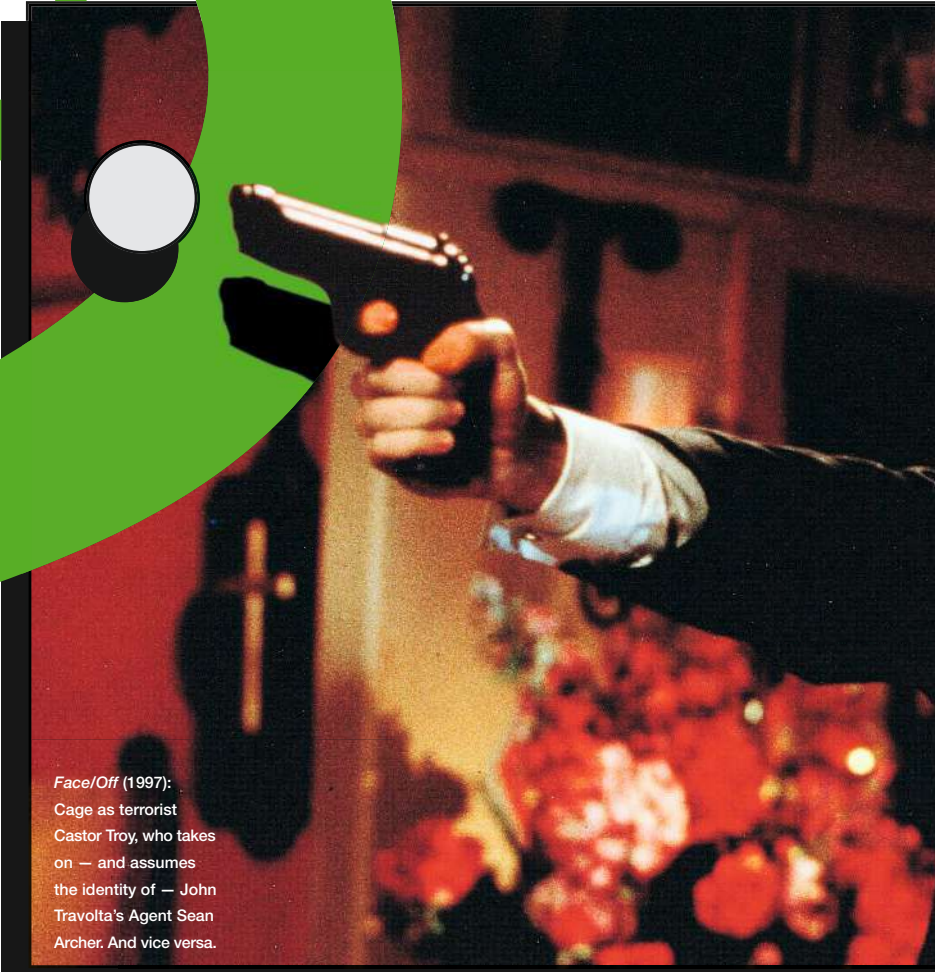
Marvel superhero Luke Cage, then threw himself back into acting with unbridled ferocity. Uncle Francis gave him a role in *Rumble Fish*, but before long he was winning roles on his own, his reputation as an ultra-zealous thespian spreading fast. For 1984's *Birdy* he had four baby teeth pulled out, then spent five weeks with his head wrapped in bandages, even away from the set. He was almost fired from *Peggy Sue Got Married* when he insisted on speaking like the claymation horse from *The Gumby Show*. And in 1988 his Method madness reached its apotheosis when he gobbled down a live cockroach for *Vampire's Kiss*. "There was no muscle in my body that wanted to eat that," he says. "But I knew the impact it would have: the shock, the gasps. It got the reaction you'd get from spending \$50 million tearing apart the White House, but it was just a man eating a bug."

Despite all that, it wasn't until David Lynch's *Wild At Heart* (1990) that Cage learned the enduring lesson of his career: follow your gut. "According to Stanislavski in *An Actor Prepares*, you're not supposed to use imitation," he says. "At the time it was a major no-no, the worst thing you could do. So I said, 'Well, let's break some rules.' One of the brushes I wanted to paint with was the notion that you can use abstract imitation in film acting, just as in any other art form. I began that experimentation with *Wild At Heart*, channelling Elvis Presley as Sailor. That was a breakthrough for me."

Dropping the ultra-disciplined Method acting, he emerged from the experience a liberated man. A YouTube video that's recently been doing the rounds shows Cage making quite possibly the greatest chat-show entrance of all time, as he arrives on *Wogan* to promote the film. Running onstage, he does a somersault, flings bank notes at the audience and executes



Wild At Heart (1990): Sailor Ripley (Cage) channels the spirit of Elvis as he serenades Lula Fortune (Laura Dern).



Face/Off (1997):
Cage as terrorist
Castor Troy, who takes
on — and assumes
the identity of — John
Travolta's Agent Sean
Archer. And vice versa.

a manic high kick. Then he strips off his T-shirt and hands it to a startled Terry Wogan. Finishing move: an almighty fist-pump.

"I'm proud of that now, in retrospect," laughs Cage. "I knew it was taking a chance, but heck, I was promoting a movie called *Wild At Heart*, so I thought I had to live the part. It was totally spontaneous: I was just riffing, feeling the energy in the audience and being as playful and punk-rock as I possibly could. I don't think Mr Wogan was too amused, but I think later, as his career continued to be as illustrious as it was, he was kind of proud of it too."

Many have tried to put a label on Cage's style. Ethan Hawke, who admits to being obsessed with his *Lord Of War* co-star, calls it "presentation performance". Online critic Vern came up with the term "mega-acting". Cage himself prefers "Nouveau Shamanic", a phrase taken from his craft bible, *The Way Of The Actor* by Professor Brian Bates. "Shamans in pre-Christian times were actually actors who would go into flights of imagination to help people sort out their problems," he explains. "If you stimulate your mind in such a way that you don't have to act, if you give yourself over to dreams and put yeast on your imagination, that magic works."

Whatever you want to call it, you'll know it when you see it. Think of that bit in *Face/Off* where Cage, dressed as a priest, grabs a girl's

behind and looks to the heavens in bug-eyed rapture. Or the scene in *Bad Lieutenant: Port Of Call New Orleans* where his corrupt lawman twitchily hallucinates an iguana on a coffee table. Or pretty much any moment from his misguided, bee-heavy remake of *The Wicker Man*. Yes, Cage has made dross — lots and lots of it — but he is very rarely boring to watch.

That trend continues with his new film *Dog Eat Dog*, a collaboration with director Paul Schrader that will make lovers of Nicolas Cage GIFs very happy indeed. During its 93-minute runtime, Cage — as stripclub-dwelling ex-con Troy — punches a policewoman repeatedly in slow-motion, squirts Willem Dafoe with mustard while both are clad only in underpants, steals a baby, references Jackie Chan and, for no apparent reason, slips into a Humphrey Bogart impression for the entire final reel. "Paul had final cut," confirms Cage. "We wanted to reflect the way culture has been going — YouTube, short attention spans, Tarantino's impact — and make a movie with the ethos, 'Don't do anything boring. Keep it entertaining. Keep it moving.'"

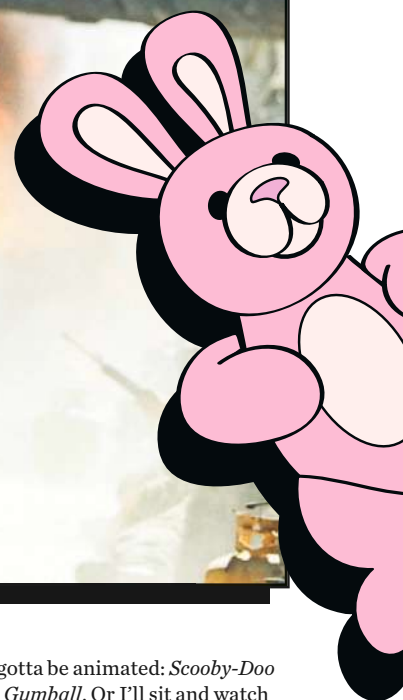
Astonishingly, his performance could have been even more apeshit: he was originally lined up to play handjob-loving maniac Mad Dog, the role ultimately taken by his old *Wild At Heart* cohort Dafoe. "I was just finishing *Army Of One*, where I was playing a pretty whacked-out character [a donkey-riding kook on a solo mission to find Bin Laden] and was just too exhausted for the flashy role," reveals Cage,



proving there are limits to even his love of lunacy. "I also found a way I wanted to go with Troy: I saw him as a lotus flower on the muddy waters of the River Nile."

The Bogie impression was 100 per cent Cage. "In my mind, Troy would fantasise about old movie stars, and Bogart was the greatest gangster of the Golden Age," he says. "I've experimented with stylisation in film acting for many years now: this continues what I started with *Wild At Heart* and continued with Adam West and *Kick-Ass*." He pauses. "The mustard, though, that was Paul. I can't take credit for that."

He doesn't work like most people. And he doesn't kick back like most people either. "The more coffee I drink, the more stunts I do, the more relaxed I get," says Cage. He's never



Clockwise from above: Paroled army ranger Cameron Poe (Cage) is the pumped-up hero in 1997's *Con-Air*; Peggy Sue Got Married (1986): Cage channels Elvis (again) as love rat Charlie Bodell; Getting his fingers burnt as Edward Malus in the panned remake of *The Wicker Man* (2006); In his first major role as Smokey in 1983's *Rumble Fish*, directed by his uncle, Francis Ford Coppola.

live action so it's gotta be animated: *Scooby-Doo* and *Chowder* and *Gumball*. Or I'll sit and watch him play his PS4, games like *Injustice*, the one with the DC characters, which is really cool and beautifully drawn, or the *Godzilla* one that came out a couple of years ago." Cage himself is looking forward to binging on *Luke Cage*, the first live-action adventure for the character who gave him his name. "This actor [Mike Colter] seems like he's really great. I'm very excited for him."

If the lizard king of Hollywood is finally becoming tamed, morphing fully into a family man (just like in his movie, *The Family Man*), fans can be re-assured that there'll be no equivalent calming down on-screen. Fuelled partly by his ongoing troubles with the IRS, partly by his feverish work ethic, there are nine more Cage performances on their way. These range from a four-day stint on thriller *Inconceivable* ("I was excited to support two leading ladies and make it really about the women") to a third team-up with John Cusack for crime flick *Southern Fury*.

The one that fans of Extreme Cage should start getting excited for, though, is *Mom And Dad*, a reunion for the star with his cop-eluding buddy Brian Taylor. Despite the vanilla title, it's a *Purge*-style horror in which parents turn into crazed killers for 24 hours; Cage is centre stage as a mad dad bent on exterminating his offspring. "It's really outside the box and it's going to piss some people off for sure," he promises. "But I'm always looking for something that stimulates the senses. A little bit of shock factor can open the floodgates and get the creative receptors going."

Shock and awe: it's the Nic Cage mission statement. All the way from the cradle to the nine-foot-tall pyramid grave. 🐞

DOG EAT DOG IS IN CINEMAS FROM 11 NOVEMBER



happier, he claims, than when holding a snake.

There are still some wild times. "Things just seem to happen, whether I want them to or not. There was an exciting lunch I had, which went out on TMZ," he says, referring to a brawl he got into with Mötley Crüe frontman Vince Neil outside a Vegas casino in April. "I don't think about myself in terms of being famous, so I sometimes get taken by surprise. You go and have a three-Martini lunch with a friend, something happens, someone's got a cell phone with a camera in it and the next thing you know it's everywhere. This day and age is so unlike when Warren Beatty was at the top of the food chain in the '70s. That was a great time to be famous."

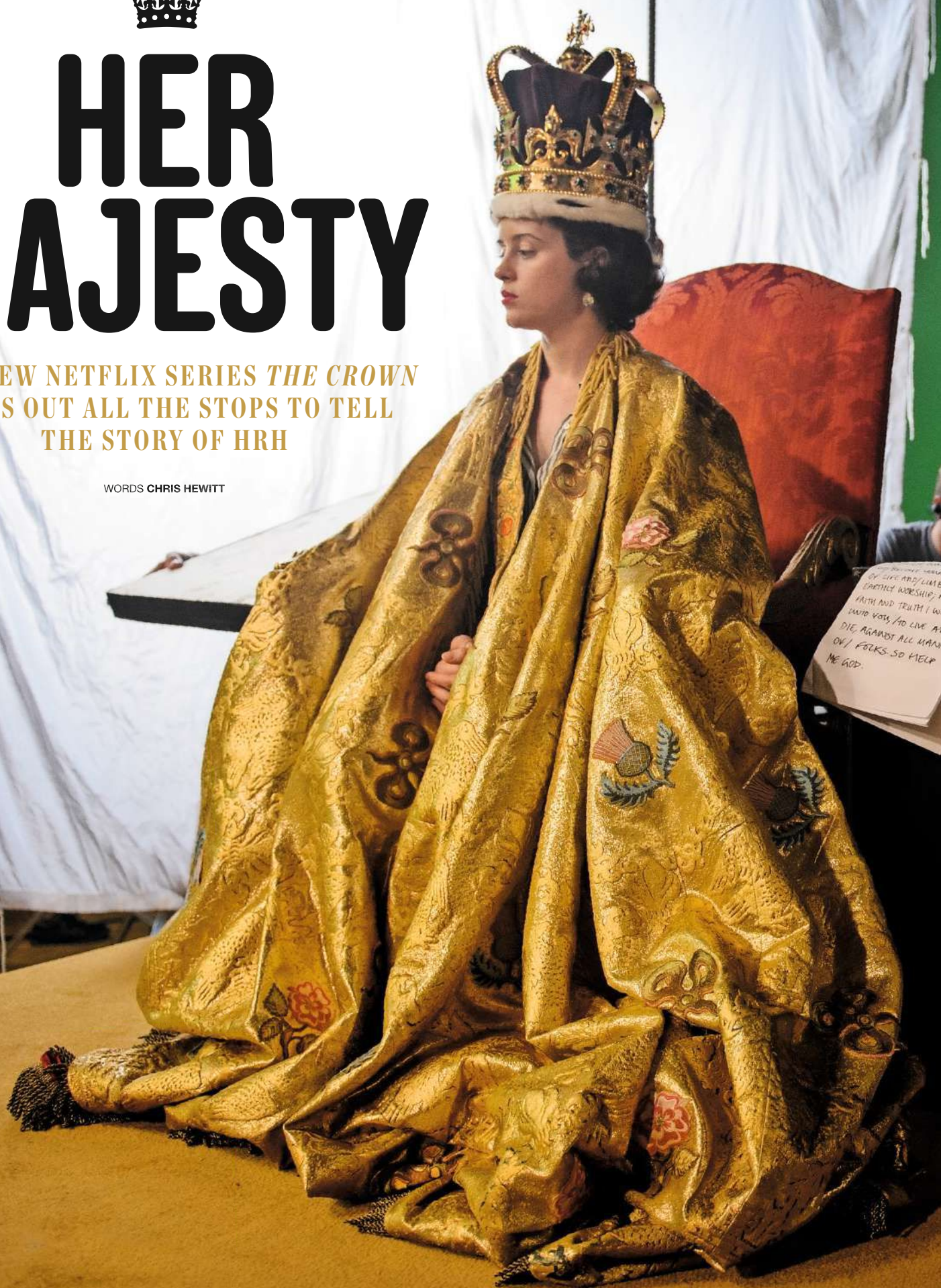
But more and more often, he says, he's choosing to head home anyway, booting up Netflix with his 11-year-old son Kal-El. "That is peace to me," he says. "He doesn't really like



HER MAJESTY

EPIC NEW NETFLIX SERIES *THE CROWN*
PULLS OUT ALL THE STOPS TO TELL
THE STORY OF HRH

WORDS CHRIS HEWITT



OF LIFE AND LIES,
EARTHLY WORSHIP, N
FAITH AND TRUTH I W
EMID VOY / TO LIVE AN
DIE, AGAINST ALL MAN
OV / FOLKS SO HELP
ME GOD.



Stephen Daldry needed a train. It was a tall order for any project, let alone a TV series. But soon enough, a rare 1950s steam locomotive (BR Standard Class 9F) was sourced for the single shot.

He was hard at work directing the first episode of *The Crown*, the Netflix show that traces the evolution of Queen Elizabeth II from post-war princess to reluctant regent and the most famous woman in the world. It was a sequence where the royal family were heading to Sandringham for what would prove to be the last Christmas for King George VI (Jared Harris). “We’d shot most of it,” says Daldry. “Then I went, ‘We really need a shot of the King on the train. Can we get one?’”

“It cost £300,000,” Daldry admits. “We’re fiscally responsible, of course, but it’s nice to have the leeway to expand when we need to.” In case it wasn’t already clear of a show shot over a period of eight months, with a cast of hundreds, at dozens of locations scattered across three countries and two continents, *The Crown* isn’t most TV shows. In fact, it may just be the biggest, and certainly the most ambitious, British series of all time.

THE CROWN’S ORIGINS can be traced back a decade. Peter Morgan, the screenwriter whose knack for a true-life tale had begotten the likes of *Frost/Nixon*, *The Damned United*, *The Queen* and even some things that didn’t star Michael Sheen, struck on an idea while writing his Elizabeth II biopic: a movie about the impact of Princess Diana’s death on the royal family and, in particular, its long-serving matriarch.

“It was the scenes between Elizabeth and Tony Blair that were the most fun to write,” he says. “There’s something about the chemistry when you put a British Prime Minister and the Queen in a room together which is just delicious. Their relationship felt like an interesting way of looking at who we are in Britain and how our country functions.”

Morgan was so taken by the traditional, secrecy-shrouded weekly audience between monarch and PM that he turned his attention to writing a new play. *The Audience* (like *The Queen* directed by Daldry) opened in 2013 and featured the Queen (played once again by Dame Helen Mirren, reprising her Oscar-winning role) sparring with a succession of the 12 (now 13) Prime Ministers who have served under her since her coronation in 1953, not least, when newly crowned, one Winston >

Churchill. “I did feel in writing that scene that this was something fruitful,” explains Morgan. “There was something of *Educating Rita* about it: this young girl and this much older man at the end of his career, with a power shift happening.”

Morgan felt there was a film in the Churchill/Windsor dynamic. Daldry did not. He had grander ideas. “Straight away I thought it would be a series,” he says. Eventually Morgan came to agree, coming up with a three-season arc which would follow the Queen through distinct stages of her life: youth, middle-age, old age. Then something happened that seems to happen quite a lot with *The Crown*: the idea grew. And grew. And, just for good measure, grew some more.

BY THE TIME Daldry and Morgan were ready to pitch the show, the vision had become six seasons, two seasons per time period, with a new actress playing the Queen at each stage of her life. “It’s nice that you know there’s an endpoint,” says Claire Foy, the first to assay the young Elizabeth Regina, of the two-year commitment. “I’m being killed off. She isn’t!” And with ten episodes per season, it was clear *The Crown* could not be made on the cheap.

The first port of call was the BBC, the channel that launched a thousand period dramas. “But the truth is,” says Daldry, “it’s

hard to really get the scale and resources from the BBC. It’s a really expensive tale to tell.”

Morgan, however, feels that somewhat unfairly besmirches the BBC. “I think we have to be accurate about this,” he cautions. “Both Stephen and I were keen to go down the road with the BBC, but Netflix said, ‘If you want us to do it, we want to do it on an exclusive worldwide basis.’”

A 40-minute meeting with Netflix’s Chief Content Officer, Ted Sarandos, elicited a huge financial commitment — “I think it was something like \$100 million for 20 hours,” says Morgan. It was enough to fund many months of shooting at Elstree Studios, a tour of some of the UK’s finest stately homes — subbing for the unsurprisingly unavailable royal residences — and an all-star cast including Matt Smith (as Prince Philip), Victoria Hamilton (as the Queen Mother), Harris Foy, and John Lithgow as Churchill. Not to mention the odd 300-grand choo-choo. “The scale is huge because their lives are huge,” says Foy. “We got out of a lot of airplanes and into a lot of cars over and over again, and you think, ‘They actually do this, all day, every day of their lives.’ We had to go the whole hog.”

Yet Morgan is keen to temper the idea that *The Crown* has unlimited resources. He points out that the show’s fifth episode — the coronation — is a clever blend of lavish location



From top: Stephen Daldry directs John Lithgow (Winston Churchill) and Harriet Walter (Clementine Churchill); The Queen’s private secretary, Tommy Lascelles (Pip Torrens), with the Queen Mum (Victoria Hamilton); Philip (Matt Smith) and Elizabeth (Claire Foy).



Fun on the water for Elizabeth II. Below: Prince Phillip meets the locals. Bottom: Conservative politician Anthony Eden (Jeremy Northam) and Elizabeth in the Highlands.



work (with Ealing Abbey doubling for its more illustrious Westminster counterpart) and CGI, plus a budget-saving conceit whereby the exiled Duke Of Windsor watches it on a black-and-white TV. Netflix may be minted, but not quite Royal Minted. “It sounds like a vast sum of money, but we have to write two seasons for that,” Morgan says. “No-one’s complaining, but it’s less than *Game Of Thrones*. Yes, the show does have an epic feel and sweep, but you don’t see the clapper loader arriving in a limo.”

SEASON 2 OF *The Crown* is already underway, set to tackle issues such as the Suez Canal crisis and take the Queen into the middle of the Swinging Sixties. When *Empire* catches up with Morgan, he’s scrambling to finish the scripts, while tentatively laying out track for even further into the future. Daldry suspects that, if all goes well and Netflix is happy with the viewing figures, the show could run and run and run. “It’s a hard story to tell in 60 hours,” he says. “I think it might be more than six [seasons].”

Indeed, there’s palpable excitement in Morgan’s voice when he talks about the Prime Ministers he’s itching to get around to — Wilson, Heath, Callaghan. And then there’s the eternal shadow of the Iron Lady. “Thatcher feels like the birth of modern Britain,” he says. “The Britain

we’re now living in. That would have to be a separate season.” Yet the writer is by no means committed to staying with *The Crown* all the way to the end. “I need to find out if the stories of her as a middle-aged woman interest me,” he admits. And out comes his dark secret: even though he’s become the unofficial chronicler of the Queen, it turns out that it was all something of an accident.

“I have absolutely no interest, really, in the British royal family,” he shrugs. “I was more interested in writing about Tony Blair than the Queen when I wrote that film. I’m as mystified about where I ended up as you can be. But I do seem to be able to write for her.” And *The Crown* has brought with it an unexpected twist. “The single thing that surprised me about it is how emotional my connection became,” he says. “It must be five generations of Britons who, at a subconscious level, are connected to this woman and this family, and I was completely unprepared for how emotional I get when I watch it.”

It’s that connection that will hopefully see him stay the course on his vastly ambitious, groundbreaking show. By which time he’ll have written one film, one play, and at least 60 hours of television about a woman he claims to have little interest in. Well, if the crown fits, wear it. 🍷

THE CROWN IS ON NETFLIX FROM 4 NOVEMBER



Aaron Eckhart, photographed
exclusively for *Empire* at
The Soho Hotel, London,
on 10 October 2016.

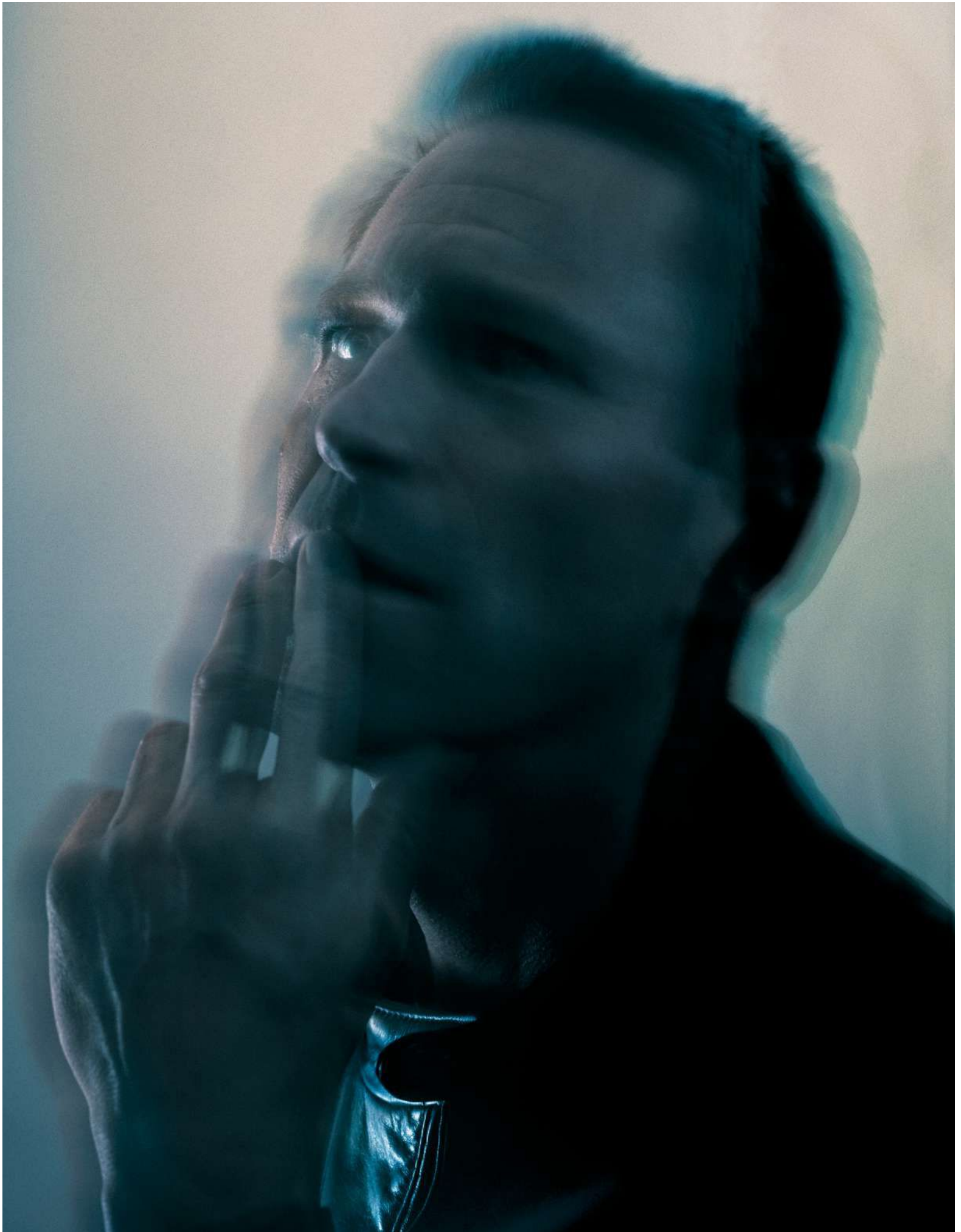


THE EMPIRE INTERVIEW

MAN OF MANY FACES

HE'S PLAYED MISOGYNISTS, CRACKED DISTRICT ATTORNEYS AND THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES. BACK WITH TWO FILMS THAT PUSH HIS LIMITS EVEN FURTHER, THE CHAMELEONIC **AARON ECKHART** LETS US IN ON HIS SECRETS

WORDS IAN FREER PORTRAITS NADAV KANDER



"I FEEL LIKE I'M OUT OF PRISON"

begins Aaron Eckhart when *Empire* suggests he is having a 'moment'. "Careers go in different ways. Sometimes you're up and sometimes you're down. Having this happen in my life now, when I'm 48, is special. This will probably never happen again."

The star is referring to his roles in two upcoming, very different movies. In Clint Eastwood's *Sully*, he plays co-pilot Jeff Skiles, who helped land a passenger plane on the Hudson River after birds took out the engine. But, more impressively, in Ben Younger's *Bleed For This*, he plays Kevin Rooney, a washed-up boxing trainer who finds redemption helping Vinny Pazienza (Miles Teller) get back in the ring after a potentially paralyzing car accident. With a paunch, a stoop and a balding head, Eckhart is borderline unrecognisable. "The first thing Ben said to me was, 'Aaron, do you want to be great?'" he remembers. "And I said, 'Yeah, I want to be great.'" The result: some of the best reviews of his life.

"It's palpable when the media doesn't like a movie," he smiles. "It's hard not to get defensive sometimes and say, 'Hey, man, we did our best.' Now it's just the opposite — their energy is overflowing. It makes me happy."

In town for *Empire*'s BFI London Film Festival *Bleed For This* gala screening, a relaxed Eckhart is back at fighting weight, looking trim in a simple grey jumper and expensive jeans. As he stands to greet us, six-foot-tall and with a jaw squarer than a Rubik's Cube, he looks more like a Brett or a Troy than an Aaron. But it's been a trademark of Eckhart's nearly 20-year career that he has subsumed his good looks and easy-going personality into a range of compelling, disparate characters. These range from Chad, the cruel middle manager who manipulates a deaf woman in *In The Company Of Men*, to George, Erin's kind-hearted biker boyfriend in *Erin Brockovich*, to Harvey Dent, the Gotham DA who becomes the hideously scarred Two-Face in *The Dark Knight*. It's a career marked by challenges accepted and conquered — and *Bleed For This* marks his biggest transformation to date.

How did you approach the physical aspect of *Bleed For This*?

I had done it twice before [in 1998 morality tale *Your Friends & Neighbors* and 2007 comedy *Meet Bill*] and initially didn't want to do it again. I was pretty skinny when I started the movie, so I gained 40lbs. That may not sound like much, but it's a lot of weight. Three months before the shoot, I went from training every single day and eating very judiciously to completely stopping my training and eating pizza voraciously. Imagine what that does to your psyche, your movements, how you perceive yourself, how others perceive you. All that got me into Kevin Rooney's headspace. And obviously shaving your head helps.

How did the people in your life react to you looking like that?

My girlfriend, who is a professional triathlete, a world-class athlete, just pretended to continue finding me attractive. We went for a walk around Rhode Island, where we shot, and I had to go into a drug store and buy baby powder to stop my legs chafing. Because I am not used to seeing myself that way or feeling that way, I would make constant excuses for how I looked. No matter what she said to me, she could not convince me that she thought I was attractive. There are some women who find that look attractive. I'm not going to say one way is better than the other.

Why is it important to you that you do all that work?

Because that's my character. Because that's my craft. Because that's going to give the audience a better experience. It makes my job more fun. And it also shows my director that I'm committed to the part. It pushes everybody around me to do their best. The effect it has is immeasurable. It says, "We are here to play. We've come to tell this story right." >



From top to bottom: With Miles Teller in *Bleed For This*; *The Dark Knight*'s Harvey Dent goes Two-Face; Squirring Julia Roberts in *Erin Brockovich*; Up close with Gerard Butler in *Olympus Has Fallen*; *Sully*'s Jeff Skiles.



"I'M NOT AFRAID TO BE BRAZEN. AND I AM GOOD AT IT."

Neil LaBute once said, "Aaron Eckhart's got a leading man's face, but he's really a character actor." What do you make of that?

I've always felt I was more of a character person. If you base your career on your looks, you are doomed to have a short career. For *Your Friends & Neighbors*, I gained 45lbs. And that character couldn't get it up. I made a conscious effort to play the opposite of a square-jawed, all-American guy. But I have never been secure in my looks. I have lots of insecurities. People look at me and say, "Hey, you have no problem getting girls and everything must be easy for you." Neither of those two things are true — at least in my mind, and that's what is important.

Thinking of *In The Company Of Men* and *Thank You For Smoking*, why have you been regularly cast as Bastard In A Suit?

I'm good at it. I'm not afraid to say audacious things and be unapologetic about it. There is an exhilaration you get from being politically incorrect and not caring. Look at our current [Presidential] candidate or look at Simon Cowell. There's a certain energy that comes with this brazenness. It's attractive on screen. And I am good at it. I am willing to be a prick.

In 2001, Sean Penn directed you and Jack Nicholson in *The Pledge*. How was that?

Just one of the great experiences of my life. There was a scene where I had to get a confession out of Benicio Del Toro's character, a guy who is mentally challenged, who may or may not have committed the murder, who is not going to confess to it. I had no idea how this fucking scene was going to go. We begin doing it and I start rubbing his stomach, petting his hair and talking to him like a baby. Between takes, I go out and Jack is watching on CCTV television. He leans over to me and says, "Christ, you practically blew him." I died laughing. I said, "Jack, you have to say that in the movie." And — boom — it's in the movie.

You re-invented yourself again to play biker George in *Erin Brockovich*, a character who has a committed female following...

I remember I started with a full beard, but Steven [Soderbergh] came up to me and said, "It doesn't look mean enough." So we artistically started chipping away at it. I didn't try to make George an attractive person. It always surprises me when people say they love George. It didn't occur to me. It's my job to blend in and play the character, not for any ulterior motives.

What did you make of Soderbergh?

He is a consummate filmmaker. There was one moment that made a big impression on me. I was standing on set watching and waiting, in my own thoughts, and Steven just came up and stood next to me. Didn't say anything, didn't look at me. He just stood there with me. That has made such an impression on my career and how I think

about directors, because he was with me. He was with me. He...was... with... me.

You also worked with Brian De Palma, playing Detective Lee Blanchard in *The Black Dahlia*. Did you get on with him?

I enjoyed De Palma a lot. A scene got cut where I interrogate somebody and attack them. During one take, I got pretty physical. I didn't hurt the actor, but I was savage — and he got quite scared. De Palma likes that. He is not afraid of stuff like that.

When Christopher Nolan offered you the role of Harvey Dent/Two-Face in *The Dark Knight*, were you surprised it was such a complex role?

Chris didn't write a script; he wrote a novel. How do you give Batman, the Joker, Two-Face and Commissioner Gordon all roles that are fleshed out, with three dimensions? It's impossible, right? And every word that Chris wrote ended up on screen, which is unprecedented. At first, when they asked me to play Two-Face, I thought it was going to be a small role because the Joker was in it. But I read the script and went, "Woah, this is real." In a sense, he is the same as Batman, avenging his ill-begotten fate. He uses those feelings in a bad way in the end, but look at what happened to him. Can we not just empathise with him in some way? I've never seen Harvey as a villain.

Nolan once described you as having the "aura of a good man pushed too far".

That's very well said. That's why I always eat enough and why I always get enough sleep — because I'm on the verge!

Perhaps your most daring role was as a paedophile in Alan Ball's *Towelhead* in 2007. Many actors would avoid that.

Playing a paedophile is very uncomfortable, but I told Alan I wasn't going to short-shrift him. There's an actor's technique: 'substitute it with your girlfriend'. At the end of the day I am looking at a 15-year-old girl and the audience don't know I am thinking about my girlfriend. They are just watching me play my game on her. It was tough, but I'm never shy about those things. If I'm going to commit to it, I commit to it. But there are some things that, as an actor, I don't want to touch.

Such as?

I've done it before [in 2004's *Suspect Zero*], but playing a serial killer is an area I don't want to get into. I know now where I'm going to have to go to prepare to play one. Though if Fincher comes in, am I gonna say no?

Is it true that, as preparation for *Sully*, you recreated the fateful flight in a simulator?

We had the actual flight plan. We took off, ascended to 3,000 feet and — BOOM! — the birds hit us. Which was astonishing each time.

How lifelike is it?

I wish we'd had it while we were filming. Your body behaves unconsciously and you physically have a reaction. You hear the whine of the engines and then silence, which is a pilot's worst nightmare. Tom [Hanks] and I tried to land the plane in the simulator. Obviously, we didn't come close. We crashed it all over the place. I did better than Tom.

A lot of the chat around *Sully* seems to be focused on your moustache.

It's true. If you go on Twitter and search for "Sully moustache" — my girlfriend did this, I didn't do it — the most play I am getting for *Sully* is for my moustache. "The real Oscar belongs to Aaron's moustache"... "The best acting in the movie was Aaron's moustache." Which is all fine by me. It came from my own loins.

At the far end of the scale from the awards-talk material, you've made movies like *The Core* and *London Has Fallen*. Does it feel different from doing the serious stuff?

I always approach it the same way. One hundred per cent. If there's a death scene, whether it's in an action movie or a sci-fi movie or a horror movie, I always approach it the same way.

But in the best sense, those films are ludicrous...

What do you mean? Going to the centre of the Earth in purple spacesuits? How dare you! Look, people love them. And everybody involved, from top to bottom, has to convince themselves that what they are doing has a purpose, so they can fully engage with the process. There are different reasons for doing different movies. Look at *I, Frankenstein*. I got to learn [Filipino martial art] Kali for six months for that. We gave it a shot. I was in the Virgin Airlines lounge the other day and this woman came up to me and said, "You are *I, Frankenstein*! I love it!" So for me all the effort was worth it because of this woman. We don't know how we affect people.

Do you enjoy the 'Has Fallen' films?

Gerry [Butler]'s part and my part are different. I would like to have more of his fun and shoot everybody. I always say my perfect job would be to run around, grunt and save the world. Who doesn't want to do that? 🍌

BLEED FOR THIS IS IN CINEMAS FROM 2 DECEMBER



INTO AFRICA

HOW DIRECTOR AMMA ASANTE TOOK ON BLISTERING HEAT AND GIANT LIZARDS TO MAKE EPIC ROMANCE *A UNITED KINGDOM*

WORDS PHIL DE SEMLYEN



IT'S A WHIRLWIND once you get involved in a project like this," reflects Amma Asante of *A United Kingdom*. "You don't talk to anyone, and family and friends go on pause." The making of the director's third film, after *A Way Of Life* (2004) and *Belle* (2014), proved to be a testing endeavour. It tells the true-life story of Seretse Khama (David Oyelowo) and Ruth Williams (Rosamund Pike), whose against-the-odds romance makes Cinderella's trip to the ball look like a Tinder encounter. He was Botswana royalty; she was a wartime ambulance driver-turned-Lloyd's insurance clerk. They met, fell in love and decided to marry. The hitch? The British Empire had other ideas.

To capture the epic scope of the stirring interracial love story, director, cast and crew travelled from London to Botswana and back again. "We shot on two continents, used drones and on some days had nearly 5,000 extras," details Asante. Having returned safely from the sweltering *veldt*, she sat down with *Empire* to talk through how she brought her film to life...



< IN THE HEAT OF THE DAY

"This photo showcases some items from my glorious wardrobe. David Oyelowo liked to laugh at me for wearing this floppy hat. We were in Botswana for five months, where the hottest day was 55 degrees. There was no shade and when you breathe you're just sucking in hot air. I was terrified at first that I wouldn't be able to think in the heat. But when you're a woman filmmaker, you can't complain — everyone thinks you're doing it because you're a woman. You learn very quickly to put your big-girl panties on and behave like a big girl.

"I'm also drinking ginger beer here, which I loved as a kid. If you go an hour without drinking in that heat, you have a problem. But I could only drink so much water, so I lived on the local ginger beer."

> UNCIVIL SERVICE

"Jack [Davenport] says he's perfected the 'swine-ish' niche, but the people his civil servant, Sir Alistair Canning, was based on were actually ten times worse. This scene was shot in Goldsmiths' Hall in the City of London, showing the power of the Empire. We had to cover up a mirror and bring in the chairs, desk and period horns, but this was an amazing room. I'd never seen baguette crystals before I saw the chandelier in there."



> BEST OF BRITISH

"Ruth and Seretse's story makes me cry. They had to overcome so many setbacks to arrive at a place where they could be happy. David fell in love with Susan Williams' book *Colour Bar* when the producers optioned it in 2010 and he'd been trying to make the film ever since. He was savvy enough to know that he had to earn more stripes to be able to carry a movie at that point.

"The timing was perfect for all three of us, in the end. We'd each had different levels of individual success, mainly platformed by America — David with *Selma*, Rosamund with *Gone Girl*, me with *Belle* — and it just felt right to come back together and do something really British. Even though a lot of *A United Kingdom* is set in Africa, it's about British history as much as anything else. It's about our history together."



< PLANE SAILING

"A few people have asked if this plane was an effects shot. We found it after a recce in Johannesburg and Pretoria, and we loved the fact it had 'South African Airways' printed on it. Ruth and Seretse's actual journey was more complex than we were able to show, but we loved being able to bring some period authenticity."

"This is our camera operator, Jon Beacham. There were days when he was doing handheld and the sweat was pouring off him. The heat was one thing, but happily we didn't have any wildlife or snake problems in rural Botswana. I did find a big lizard in my room, though. I ran down to the hotel bar and said, 'I need an African man and I don't care if he's black or white — he just needs to get up to my room and take this thing off the ceiling.'"



> THE KING'S SPEECH

"Seretse's speeches [to the people of Botswana] needed punch, so David and I played around with how they'd work on screen. The real speeches went on for four days and were more like court cases. To have more impact, we decided to have one strong speech to more people, so in the end the original transcripts didn't help much.

"For David and I, our paths haven't been the same but we've had similar journeys, so we're just very easy with each other. We first worked together 18 years ago on a BBC show I created called *Brothers And Sisters*, and it's really interesting when you've watched someone long enough to see them grow up, and you've grown up too. I think that was his first role out of drama school and he was just about to get married to his wife Jessica. He's obviously more mature now, but he always had this quiet dignity and confidence. He hasn't become 'Hollywood' at all."

> ROSAMUND'S BABY

"Ruth is a really interesting character. She existed in a wartime world where women had to do men's jobs, so her experiences were an early feminism. Then she went to a place where they didn't even have running water, which must have been a culture shock. I suspect if she was here today she'd say she just got on with it. I admire her greatly. It was really important that she had a strong arc in the film, and one that complemented Seretse's. I'm fascinated by how human beings cope with extraordinary, stressful moments in their lives.

"After the Toronto [Film Festival] screening, the child of the baby you see in the film — who is now a grown, very handsome man and happens to be the nephew of the President of Botswana — stood up and said, 'You've done this for my country and I'm very, very grateful for that.' We were all in tears."



< CORRIDORS OF POWER

"This is St Stephen's Hall in Parliament. We were the second film to shoot in Parliament, after *Suffragette*. That's Jack Lowden as Tony Benn on the right. I wish I could have told more of his story, because Tony and Seretse were like brothers. Melissa Benn, Tony's daughter, is Seretse's goddaughter and one of Seretse's sons was named after Tony. I feel a bit gutted that I couldn't explore that relationship more, but trying to explain the impact of Tony Benn in someone else's story just doesn't do him justice. When Jack read for the role we all looked at each other and said, 'It's him.' He just got him right. In the middle is old Anton Lesser as Clement Atlee. He only had this one scene, but he did it fabulously."



^ THE TALISMAN

"Tom Felton, who was in *Belle*, plays a civil servant called Rufus Lancaster in the film. Tom's my lucky charm and I'm considering putting him in my next film, but it's set in Nazi Germany. Am I really going to turn Tom Felton into a Nazi? He was like, 'Amma, I can do it!' I said, 'I know you can, Tom, but people will think I've got some kind of weird obsession with you.'"



< IT'S A WRAP

"I loved shooting in Botswana when it got to 5pm; it was just so pleasant. Although, at the time of the year we were shooting, the sun goes down in 12 minutes. We had to either shoot our sunset shots in record time or over the course of several days, which is hard for actors.

"It's been lovely to see the response to the film at screenings. I've made it for my dad, for my mum, for all the people who have never really had the opportunity to see their continent depicted on screen in a positive way. So often when we see Africa in movies, it's not necessarily fun to look at, but it's a beautiful, beautiful place where great things have happened. I can't wait to go back."

**A UNITED KINGDOM IS IN CINEMAS
FROM 25 NOVEMBER**



THE LIGHT KNIGHT

FROM BAT-HIGHS TO BAT-LOWS, ADAM WEST REFLECTS
ON 50 YEARS OF BEING THE CAPED CRUSADER

WORDS ALEX GODFREY





“BREDFN”

booms Adam West.

Right from the moment he greets *Empire*, on the phone from his Idaho home, the star is exactly as playful and off-the-wall as you'd hope. “A title like *Empire*, it's so grand!” he declares. “Is it the Byzantine Empire, the Roman Empire...?” Everything's a hoot; nothing's taken too seriously — each time he catches himself dwelling on something, he exaggerates it for comedic effect. He's pure, uncut Adam West. And by Adam West, of course, we mean Batman.

West has been synonymous with the character now for five decades. His *Batman* TV show was first broadcast on the ABC network in January 1966, followed six months later by a film. Since then, West has been inseparable from his do-gooding, super-droll take on the Caped Crusader. Having created a wholly unique vocal delivery, he's long since adopted it as his natural speaking voice. “Alright,” he says as we get down to business, “this is Batman the elder.” Indeed. He's 88. And he's just played Batman again.

Batman: Return Of The Caped Crusaders is a brand-new, feature-length animated take on '60s Batman, voiced by three of the original cast members: West as the Dark Knight, Burt Ward as Robin, and Julie Newmar as Catwoman. It was made to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the show, and happily the original tone — the irreverence, the self-awareness, the sheer ridiculousness of it all — remains intact.

“I thought, ‘My God, it's about time you guys called me up!’” says West about being approached for the project. “And it's just nice to be back! What goes around comes around, you know.”

West was 37 when Batman burst into his world. A jobbing actor, he'd just done a stint in Europe making Spaghetti Westerns, and had recently starred in a film called *Robinson Crusoe On Mars*. But it was a TV ad for Nestlé, in which West played a smooth, wisecracking character called Captain Quik, that bagged him his new gig.

The commercial was seen by producer William Dozier, the man hired by the ABC network to bring DC Comics' *Batman* to the screen. Dozier and writer Lorenzo Semple Jr had been grappling with the adaptation, finally deciding to push silliness to the fore. *Batman* would mix colourful action with deadpan satire, paying tribute to its comic-book heritage while simultaneously parodying it. And as soon as Dozier saw West arching a wry eyebrow on his TV, he knew they had their hero. West, though, was initially hesitant. “My agent said, ‘Kid, you gotta see them, they're interested in ya,’” he remembers. “I said, ‘What's it called, Lou?’ He said, ‘*Batman*.’ I said, ‘Really? I'm trying to have





Clockwise from top left: Bruce Wayne (Adam West) and Robin (Burt Ward) in 1966's *Batman* TV series; West and Ward reprise their roles in this year's *Batman: Return Of The Caped Crusaders*; Batman tools up in April 1966's 'While Gotham City Burns'; Batman shows the criminals who's boss, 1966.

a serious career here.' But I got curious."

He read the pilot, thought it was hilarious, and successfully screentested. Burt Ward, meanwhile, was a 19-year-old karate blackbelt, fresh out of college and selling real estate. More than 1,000 actors auditioned for Robin, but watch Ward's exuberant test online and you can see why he got the part. Having brought a friend, he does some glorified somersaults, throws the friend over his shoulder, then says, "I'm gonna give an exhibition of karate," before smashing a board with his hand.

Right from day one, West brought his own ludicrous rhythms to the character: he'd move slowly and ponderously as Batman mused over a clue, then *erupt* with adrenaline when he deciphered it. Not every network executive was impressed. "I got many notes, many memos, many phone calls," West says. "Kid, what are you doing?! Don't do that! And I said, 'Well, I'm sorry, I have to do it this way or it's not going to last, or be funny for the adults.' I saw the humour in it." Upon viewing the first dailies, the crew agreed.

The first-ever episode, 'Hi Diddle Riddle',

set out the show's stall. After a cake explodes in the Moldavian Prime Minister's face, revealing a riddle, Commissioner Gordon (Neil Hamilton) and Chief O'Hara (Stafford Repp) summon Batman, who pursues the Riddler (Frank Gorshin) with Robin. They're led to the What A Way To Go-Go discotheque, where Batman, in full garb, gets down with a seductive siren, putting an improvised spin on '60s dance craze the Watusi. Then his drink is spiked, and the episode ends on a cliffhanger, the drugged Batman useless as Robin is strapped to a table. "Is this the ghastly end of our dynamic duo?" asks the narration (voiced by Dozier). It was, of course, only the beginning.

West, reminiscing about his favourite moments, brings up his dance from this episode, later dubbed 'the Batusi'. As we move on to another subject, he interjects, "I can still do it!" He enthuses about the show's vibrancy. "As an homage to the earlier comic books — the more innocent comic books, if you will — we used a lot of primary colours," he says. "Colours that people like [Roy] Lichtenstein were using. We were trying to reflect the times, even with the music. Batman had a surfing contest with the Joker — I thought that was really funny."

Airing on 12 January 1966, 'Hi Diddle Riddle' seized an immense 52 per cent audience share. For the rest of the first season, two episodes were aired a week, getting equally massive viewing figures. The show was nominated for three Emmys, and was responsible for shifting \$75 million-worth of Batman merchandise (hello, Joker dog costume and Batman snuggie) in America that year. Half of Hollywood wanted to appear on the show, with guest stars including Shelley Winters, Otto Preminger, Vincent Price and Liberace; for less demanding cameos, the likes of Sammy Davis Jr and Jerry Lewis would pop out of windows as Batman and Robin unconvincingly scaled buildings.

The *Batman* movie was, admitted Semple Jr, a cash-in. He wrote it in four weeks, only ever doing one draft. The big gimmick, somewhat foreshadowing *Suicide Squad*, saw the TV show's four biggest villains team up: the Joker (Cesar Romero), the Riddler (Frank Gorshin), the Penguin (Burgess Meredith) and Catwoman (Lee Meriwether, temporarily replacing the otherwise engaged Julie Newmar).

At \$1.5 million, the budget was pumped-up, enabling the crew to build a new Batcopter and Batboat. But the shoot, like the writing period, was shockingly fast. Beginning two weeks after the wrap party for the show's first season, it was completed in 26 days. Post-production, meanwhile, lasted under a month, with the film rocketed into cinemas on 30 July 1966. Despite all the haste, the film was well-received, with *Variety* citing its "uniformly impressively improbable" acting. Fans went crazy for several instantly iconic moments: Batman running around Santa Barbara pier trying to get rid of a bomb, Batman fighting off a shark with

Shark-Repellent Bat Spray, and the United Nations Security Council (or, as they were called in the film, the United World Security Council) being turned to dust.

West and Ward were now big, blazing stars. "In a sense, I took advantage of it," West says, adding conspiratorially, "with all of the human pleasures that one could accrue." Ward has said the pair were "sexual vampires", especially during the personal appearances they made in costume at weekends, where he claims women were banging on their windows while they were in bed with other women. On one occasion, West and Gorshin attended a Los Angeles orgy, but were asked to leave, naked, when they began talking in character. (Hopefully they didn't also yell out, "SPLAT!" or, "ZOWIE!") Heading up the Batman phenomenon was, says West, intense.

But it didn't last. In part due to the film, the second season was rushed, and quality slipped. Season 3 fared even worse, and as ratings waned, budgets were cut. Kids were still watching, but the adults (who, with their spending power, were needed by ABC) had deserted, and the show was cancelled. NBC offered to fund a fourth season, but the \$800,000 sets had already been torn down and destroyed, so that was that: in 1968, after three years and 120 episodes, *Batman* was Batcanned.

The show rapidly faded from view. In 1970, DC editor Denny O'Neil revamped Batman, making him darker and broodier, in line with Bob Kane's original 1939 vision, but with a grittier tone to suit the new decade. The 1980s brought graphic novels, with Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns* firmly pushing the character into adult territory. All along, the Adam West show was used as an example of what not to do. Kane said the show's comedic tone had changed the genre for the worse. In an introduction to his book, Miller decried the show's quips. "For me," he wrote, "Batman was never funny."

As for West, having thought the show would make him an A-list star, he instead found it typecast him. Needing to work regardless, he did whatever films he could, ending up in the likes of *The Happy Hooker Goes Hollywood* and *Zombie Nightmare*. He continued to do appearances as Batman, reaching a personal low when he was fired out of a cannon at a carnival in Indiana. His bank account and self-respect went down, while his alcohol consumption and self-destruction went up. The bat had become an albatross.

"It's been sheer torture!" he says now, making light of his ups and downs. "We've got six children and I've had to keep working." In 1986 he moved with his family from LA to the Idaho farm where he still resides, among elk and bears. From there he saw his status as the sole screen Batman disappear. When Tim Burton's 1989 film was released, West said he was angry not to have been offered the role. "Even more painfully," he wrote in his 1994 autobiography *Back To The Batcave*, "our contribution to the legend was ignored, ridiculed and denigrated by certain of the filmmakers..."

As with every one of the '60s show's jeopardy-packed cliffhangers, however, there has been a happy ending. West's *Batman* has enjoyed a revival over the past few years, with a huge new wave of appreciation for the work. At conventions, West and Ward are given wild ovations, with fans telling emotional stories of what the show has meant to them. "To hear a judge or a janitor say that I made a difference in their life, that's marvellously rewarding," West says. "One man said I made him want to be a superhero, and he did the next best thing, which was to join the Marines." It made an equal impact on pop culture. In *Pulp Fiction*, John Travolta riffed on the Batuser on the Jack Rabbit Slim's dancefloor, while Nicolas Cage went full West as Big Daddy in *Kick-Ass*. Seth MacFarlane cast West as himself on *Family Guy*, while Hollywood stars regularly pay tribute (see right). When Christian Bale was asked in March this year by *Entertainment Tonight* to name his favourite Batman, he said, "You can't beat Adam West."

Batman: Return Of The Caped Crusaders brings it all full circle. "It took a little time," jokes West of slipping back into character. "About 20 seconds!" We ask if it felt good doing it, and for a while he gets serious. "That's a very good question," he says. "I didn't know whether it would. I just went in and did it. But as we went along I began to feel better about it." The film is funny, a refreshing rejection of the gloomier Batmen of recent years. "It's starting to heat up, Batman," worries Ward's Robin as the pair, strapped onto a massive replica buffet tray, are pushed into an oven. "But we do smell delicious." Meanwhile, for a sequence in which the dynamic duo battle the villains in space, Batman's astronaut's helmet features Bat-ears. Watching it, you're struck by how ridiculous the character really is, regardless of how gravely some may treat him. This is all about fun.

And it's not in isolation: in February we'll have *The LEGO Batman Movie*, which, with its knowing, self-parodying yucks takes more than a cue from 1966. In the past 50 years, West's Batman has been through a lot, but is back with a bang. *Return Of The Caped Crusaders* exists because of this renewed love of the original show and film, and the recontextualisation must feel good. "I never think of that more than twice a week," West deadpans. He laughs, then gets serious for a brief moment. "It's not a matter of being vindicated or anything else: it's just finally realising that people are recognising what I did. What we did. And appreciating it even more. And it keeps building. Every poll of your favourite Batman, I'm winning!"

He checks his ego, and laughs. "I sound like Trump, don't I? This is terrible." Not at all. Holy comeback, Batman! It's about time. 🦇

BATMAN: RETURN OF THE CAPED CRUSADERS IS OUT NOW ON DOWNLOAD AND ON 7 NOVEMBER ON DVD AND BLU-RAY





Sammy Davis Jr joins
Ward and West in 'The
Clock King's Crazy
Crimes', 12 October 1966.

HOLY BAT-FANS!



A-list Adam West aficionados

MARK HAMILL

Hamill grew up watching the *Batman* show, and years later, before it was available to buy, had Fox send him tapes of every episode. "Adam is so underrated as an actor," he said recently. "He walked the line between sincerity and parody and set the tone."



NICOLAS CAGE

"Adam West was my favourite Batman," Cage once said. "I always wanted to be him." He achieved that by channelling the star in *Kick-Ass*. Later, when Jay Leno got them together on his talk-show, Cage said to West, "Thank you for saving my childhood."



JERRY SEINFELD

When asked in 2011 which TV series the comedian would take with him to a desert island, he chose *Batman*. "It's funny, it's got adventure, it's got some romance, it's very colourful and it's very upbeat," he said. "It made me happy when I was a kid."



CONAN O'BRIEN

The TV host is a huge fan, once taking his family to a convention to meet West. In 1991, O'Brien co-wrote and produced a hilarious pilot called *Lookwell*, starring West as an ex-TV detective who tries to solve crimes for the cops. Alas, NBC didn't pick it up for a series.



JJ ABRAMS

Batman was the first show to excite Abrams as a toddler. "I was just out of my fucking mind over *Batman*," he recalled. "I remember going into my first day of kindergarten and crying because I was so sad I was going to miss *Batman*... I couldn't get a breath."



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RE.VIEW

THE INDISPENSABLE GUIDE TO HOME ENTERTAINMENT

EDITED BY CHRIS HEWITT



THE EMPIRE VIEWING GUIDE

THE NEON DEMON

Nicolas Winding Refn takes us on a tour of his dark fashion fantasy

WORDS DAMON WISE



00:03:01

JESSE'S 'DEAD' — When we first meet her, aspiring model Jesse (Elle Fanning) is lying on a chaise longue covered in blood, posing for a morbid shoot by amateur photographer Dean (Karl Glusman), soon to be her boyfriend. "That was the idea that started the whole journey," says Nicolas Winding Refn, the film's co-writer and director. "Before I even had a story, I came up with this idea: death and beauty in one shot." >

THE
EMPIRE
VERDICT

THE NEON
DEMON
★★★
CERT 18

What we said: "Imagine *America's Next Top Model* written by Sofia Coppola and directed by Dario Argento — it's cool, baffling, darkly funny, super-slow, vapid, stunning, at times tedious and — in its last third — utterly bat-shit crazy.

Notable extras: Refn commentary, featurettes.



00:17:30

THE SCOUT __ Jesse visits a modelling scout (Christina Hendricks), who immediately sees her potential. “This scene sets up Jesse wanting to be a model,” says Refn. “It was important to make a point of that, because Christina’s character sees so many girls, but Jesse has ‘the thing’. She’s ‘the one’. So again it plays on ideas of the occult — she’s chosen without even knowing it.” Hendricks was the first actor hired for the film.



00:28:10

KEANU THE LANDLORD __ “This was one of those lucky opportunities,” says Refn of casting Keanu Reeves as Hank, the shifty desk guy at Jesse’s motel. “I reached out to Keanu, asking if he would be interested in coming down to the world of sitting on a plastic chair and drinking bad coffee — in other words, making a low-budget movie in LA. In this scene, Keanu is like the wolf in the forest.”



00:30:03

ROAR! __ Jesse comes back from a date with Dean to find a mountain lion tearing up her room. “I loved the idea of introducing an animal of beauty, trapped in a motel room,” says Refn. “But it was also a way of introducing an animal into the world of the occult. What Jesse is seeing, in a way, is an omen of her own demise, because what does a mountain lion do? It feeds.”



00:50:09

BLOODSUCKER __ After Jesse aces a job interview she finds Sarah (Abbey Lee) in the bathroom, having smashed the mirror, complaining that no-one “sees” her. Jesse cuts her hand on the shards — and Sarah sucks at the wound. “Having lost a job opportunity to the new girl, she desires what she has — and one of the key elements of witchcraft is, of course, blood. And, like the mountain lion, it adds to the theme of feeding.”



01:00:56

THE TRIANGLE __ Having been chosen by a famous designer (Alessandro Nivola) to close his catwalk show, Jesse becomes fascinated by a neon triangle. “I wanted *The Neon Demon* to have a symbol,” says Refn, “and the triangle is a classic occult symbol. Each point is one of the three women — Sarah, Gigi [Bella Heathcote] and Ruby [Jena Malone] — and each of them desires what Jesse has.”



01:28:29

RUBY KISSES THE CORPSE __ In perhaps the film’s most infamous scene, Ruby is rebuffed by Jesse and has sex with a corpse. “Jesse has become the antagonist, because she is revealing herself as the neon demon,” says Refn. “The protagonist is Ruby, because she’s the victim. All she wanted was Jesse’s beauty, but she’s denied and feels pain. This is reminiscent of the opening scene: death and beauty are combined again.”



01:36:09

JESSE’S REALLY DEAD __ “The neon demon is that force of nature, of unadulterated narcissism,” says Refn. “That complete self-love makes her almost supernatural.” That’s illustrated in the shocking finale, where Jesse is pursued, killed and eaten by Sarah, Gigi and Ruby. “As for the idea of Jesse being pushed into the swimming pool, that’s a symbol of Hollywood. It’s the Hollywood dream — and it’s empty.”



01:49:54

THE EYEBALL __ After Jesse’s death, Gigi and Sarah are doing a shoot when Gigi starts to regurgitate body parts. “All three women eat Jesse, and each has a different reaction,” says Refn. “Ruby goes through a ceremonial rebirth, where she menstruates and holy blood flows out of her. Sarah is seen again. Whereas the one who is destroyed is Gigi. She’s trying to create artificial beauty, by changing her looks. Her body rejects Jesse.”



01:51:35

THE FINAL WALK __ The credits roll over sand flats. “I liked the idea of the desert being bare,” says Refn. “It’s the first time you see nature, but nature as death — death and beauty again, with a woman walking. She’s the demon that appears when everyone needs to feed on their own desires.”

THE NEON DEMON IS OUT ON 31 OCTOBER ON DVD, BLU-RAY AND DOWNLOAD

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THE EMPIRE MASTERPIECE



THUNDERBOLT AND LIGHTFOOT

Michael Cimino's buddy flick is also Clint Eastwood's most daring movie

1974 / CERT 18

WORDS ADAM SMITH

PERHAPS THE MOST surprising thing about *Thunderbolt And Lightfoot*, arguably Clint Eastwood's best film and certainly his most interesting, is that for a movie that revels in its own unpredictability and freewheeling style, one that nods both to the French New Wave and its scion, the New Hollywood, its origins were almost wholly corporate. In the early '70s Eastwood's William Morris agent, Leonard 'The Smiling Jackal' Hirshan, had been handed a screenplay by Michael Cimino, another Morris client and a hot former advertising kid-turned-writer of Douglas Trumbull's *Silent Running*. Unusually Hirshan forwarded it to Eastwood, who generally preferred to generate projects in-house at his production shingle Malpaso. It was an earlyish example of the wholly agency-driven deal, the

Hollywood model that was fast taking over, and which left agencies and independent producers in pole position. The studios often not much more than venture capitalists writing the cheques and taking delivery of the final print.

Eastwood liked the story: superficially an amiable shaggy-dog tale about an old-time safe-breaker hiding out in the unlikely guise of a small-town preacher whose career is revived, and life restarted, by a chance encounter with a kind of manic pixie-dream drifter, in the shape of Jeff Bridges' *Lightfoot* (also a WM client). But there was a wrinkle: Cimino wouldn't sell without himself attached to direct. The prospective star and director met and, perhaps surprisingly given the pair's very different styles and outlooks, hit it off. After extracting a quick



Clint reaches
a crossroad in
his career.

rewrite of *Magnum Force* (which was well into pre-production and, in Eastwood's opinion, in need of "juice") from Cimino as down payment, the neophyte director headed off to Big Sky Country to scout the movie's stunning locations. Meanwhile, Malpas cut a deal with United Artists to provide the funding, and thus introduced Cimino to the studio he would later, mostly unfairly, be accused of destroying with *Heaven's Gate*.

It's not difficult to see what UA liked, or thought commercial, about the set-up. A buddy road movie charged with the twin star power of a post-*Dirty Harry* Eastwood (as the bank-robbing mastermind Thunderbolt) and a hot-to-trot Jeff Bridges, it had plenty of goofy broad comedy involving rednecks and trucks full of chickens, was goosed with enough (female) eye candy and

violence for the drive-in hordes, and came capped with a vaguely wistful post-*Easy Rider* downbeat ending which would play to the counter-cultural crowd.

What they would actually get when Cimino delivered his cut was indeed a perfectly serviceable road flick, but it was so much more as well and, whisper it not, the most homoerotic movie set in the West until Jack and Ennis started making goo-goo eyes at each other over the livestock in *Brokeback Mountain*. Reading queer subtexts into apparently unlikely celluloid subject matter has been entertaining sport ever since Quentin Tarantino outed Maverick and Goose, but with *Thunderbolt And Lightfoot* there's not much sub to the text. The pair's earliest exchange after their initial meet cute, during which the younger man rescues Clint from an enraged George Kennedy, has Thunderbolt complimenting his new friend's peepers ("All great race drivers have blue eyes — it's a fact") before requesting he remove his belt. By the third act Cimino finds himself only able to resolve the narrative's building sexual confusions by sticking Lightfoot in a dress, one that Bridges wears surprisingly daintily, albeit while packing a revolver down the back of his pantyhose. Meanwhile the irresistibly tragic denouement doesn't so much nod to as gesticulate wildly while firing off party poppers at that other codified tale of same-sex desire, *Midnight Cowboy*.

Eastwood's own reaction to the finished film was, even for a man who rarely reached for his own trumpet, pointedly diffident. He may have been disappointed with the movie's relatively lacklustre box-office performance (he criticised UA's marketing of the film and resolved never to work with them again). And, still bruised from failing to gain an Oscar nomination for his directorial debut, *Play Misty For Me*, Bridges' nomination as Best Supporting Actor, while he was again ignored, apparently rankled. But it's possible he detected in it the possibility of a very different career direction, one that he would consciously forswear. Certainly even the best of his subsequent films, *The Outlaw Josey Wales* and *Unforgiven*, are solidly traditional and narratively conservative, with no trace of the thematic dangers of *Thunderbolt And Lightfoot*, the risk-taking Eastwood apparently having expired to the strains of Paul Williams crooning *Where Do I Go From Here*.

As for Cimino, his death earlier this year provoked much drearily recycled discussion of his twin career lodestars, *The Deer Hunter* and *Heaven's Gate*. But back before all that much-reported hoo-hah it's *Thunderbolt And Lightfoot*, with its theme of wounded men reaching out for connection against the backdrop of a strangely broken country, with its unexpected narrative detours, outbreaks of crazy ebullience and lingering air of tragedy, of promise snuffed out and roads untaken, that really sharpens the sense of loss.

THUNDERBOLT AND LIGHTFOOT IS OUT NOW ON DVD, BLU-RAY AND DOWNLOAD

KIDS WATCH CLASSICS

Big films tackled by little people

ILLUSTRATION OLLY GIBBS



MAX JOLIN — 6 SINGIN' IN THE RAIN

Did you enjoy *Singin' In The Rain*?

I very much liked it. I liked all the tricks that Don [Gene Kelly] did. I think he's very elegant. It's elegant when he's skipping along with the umbrella behind his back.

What would you say the film is about?

Well, it starts in a big place with lots and lots and lots of people and there are cars with very famous people, and it's set in Hollywood and some very famous people come out. So there's Don, who is the main character, and he's with someone... He hasn't got married to her, but Lina [Jean Hagen] is her name and I don't really like her. She's quite annoying and irritating. She has a high, squeaky voice.

Did you understand the stuff about how all the films at that time had no talking in them?

Yes. I was a bit weirded out by it.

Can you imagine going to the cinema and every film you'd see was silent?

Yeah. It would be a bit boring. Even if it was *Star Wars*!

During the film you said, "Actors are playing actors!" Was that interesting?

Yes, because I just think it's cool. It was quite interesting. I liked all of the films they made. I liked it when Don ran into that building and then they blew it up.

You seemed quite taken by Don's friend, Cosmo [Donald O'Connor]...

Yeah. Well, he's extremely funny. I liked it when he is dancing and fighting with that dummy, and I liked it when he did that backflip on the wall. And I like the song that he did, *Make 'Em Laugh*... I wish Cosmo was my dad.

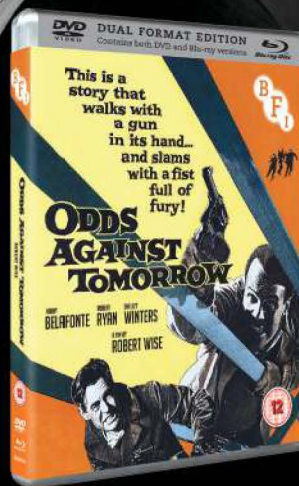
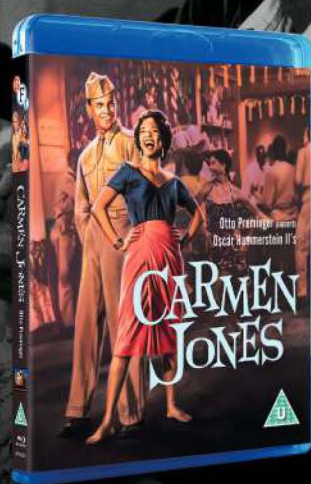
Your dad?! Why's that?

He could teach me tricks. [Long, thoughtful pause] And he's very tall.

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BEST OF TIMES | WORST OF TIMES

NICK OFFERMAN

WORDS CHRIS HEWITT



LOCATION

I believe Islay in the Hebrides of Scotland is the most beautiful place on Earth. I shot an episode of *Parks And Recreation* there, when Ron Swanson goes on a treasure hunt. It was so gorgeous I openly wept. But it was a wide shot so you couldn't see.



Also from *Parks And Rec.* North of LA there's a place called Antelope Valley, where they have ranches. It was not the location, but the heat. We were pretending it was Christmas at the height of summer. I was wearing a sweater. Unpleasant with the amount of body hair I boast.

COSTUME

I just made a movie called *The Little Hours*, which is set in the Middle Ages. I'm a lord and I got to have a castle in Tuscany and they gave me a big beard, and I got a Prince Valiant wig and cloak. I love playing dress-up. My dream is that my career leads ultimately to Gandalf or Dumbledore.

I made a movie called *Lush* in the late '90s where I had to be made up as a woman. I enjoyed it tremendously until I saw myself in a mirror. I imagined I would be ravishing. I looked like Elizabeth Taylor meets Kathy Bates, if both put on a 100lb and got beaten senseless.

AUDITION

I was asked to audition for *Deadwood*, as Tom Mason, a drunk criminal who had to be nude. I was a fan of [creator] David Milch and I should have been nervous, but I walked in and felt this was it, he had found me.



I auditioned for a single line in *The Men Who Stare At Goats*. It was horrible. Then on set it was me, Kevin Spacey and George Clooney. I decided then I didn't mind auditioning for single-line roles.

ADVICE

I made a film called *The Founder*, in which I play one of the brothers who created McDonald's. It's the best part I've had and I had some insecurity. I asked director John Lee Hancock if I was doing okay. I come from the theatre and I'm used to playing facial expressions to hit the back row. He said, "You're great. Do less."



I had a small role in *Sin City* and I had a fight scene with Bruce Willis' character. We shot it with his double, then Bruce came in to do close-ups, without us. I asked director Robert Rodriguez if I was going to have Bruce actually hitting me. He said, "Listen, know your place." His bedside manner was wanting.

PERFORMANCE

Doing *The LEGO Movie* was the greatest pleasure. Those directors [Phil Lord and Christopher Miller] let me play with the voice, rather than wanting my usual stentorian, slow-talking sheriff, and let me come up with this quasi-Irish weirdo. At some point we'll do a sequel. I am extremely titillated.

I once had the great fortune to be the main antagonist in the much-heralded *Miss Congeniality 2: Armed And Fabulous*. It was a big deal for me. I was unknown and I got to have a huge fight scene with Sandra Bullock. I was thrilled and I hope to never lay eyes on that movie.

GOOD CLEAN FUN: MISADVENTURES IN SAWDUST AT OFFERMAN WOODSHOP IS AVAILABLE NOW ON DOWNLOAD, AND OUT ON 7 NOVEMBER IN HARDBACK





A RARE BIRD

FORTY-SEVEN YEARS SINCE
THE RELEASE OF *KES*,
DIRECTOR KEN LOACH
CONSIDERS WHAT IT IS ABOUT
A BOY AND HIS BIRD THAT
STILL PACKS A PARTICULAR
PUNCH IN 2016

WORDS TERRI WHITE



IN THE BEGINNING, there was just a story. Of a boy, the most ordinary of boys, and his bird. "It's a very simple tale," says Ken Loach of *Kes* as we talk in the Soho office of his production company, Sixteen Films. "It begins with the writing and with the central image of the bird that flies free and the boy that is in chains."

That writing, and the origins of *Kes*, was Barnsley-born Barry Hines' 1968 book *A Kestrel For A Knave*, set in a South Yorkshire mining town. Though Hines never specified an *actual* town, by the time Ken Loach and long-time producer Tony Garnett scooped it up, they had located it in North Athersley, near Barnsley. It was, in the late 1960s, a town sat on seams of coal ripped from the earth by miners who were also the lowest-paid workers in the developed world. This was before the strikes that would follow but at a time when the endgame was already in play — oil and gas a resource on the rise and pits creaking under cuts.

The human tale Loach placed at the heart of this: that of Billy Casper (David Bradley), a dirty-necked working-class boy who is bullied at home by brutal elder brother Jud (Freddie Fletcher), ignored by his single-parent mother (Lynne Perrie), excluded by his classmates — getting shoved in goal as he's useless outfield — and dismissed by teachers as having "just come out from under a stone". The future is fatalistically laid out before him, predictable and drained of colour (beautifully rendered by pre-flashed film stock): he will go down the pit like Jud. The only difference from his current existence at school, "I'll get paid for not liking it." But, for the first time in his life, Billy's horizons begin to broaden and his outlook lift when he finds a kestrel and trains it using a book on falconry he filched from the library.

Billy, then, was an everyboy or everygirl in British society: those from working-class communities who were told not only that nothing was expected of them, but to expect nothing of or for themselves to begin with.

WINGING IT

Finding that everyboy was the first, most vital task. And true to Loach's naturalistic approach, he didn't seek out a child actor but headed for the local school, St Helens in Athersley South. "We got very lucky," Loach remembers of finding 14-year-old Bradley, who'd only been in a local play and a pantomime. "He was spectacularly good. We could have looked for a year and not found anyone that good."

He didn't just cast Bradley, however — 30 boys and 30 girls, all from his year at school, were given parts, along with a couple of kids from a neighbouring school. "It was bizarre — they *came to school*," Loach says of the shoot that took place in the summer holidays. "But I think it was because the food was better!"



Out of these caravans came these amazing meals and that was their main memory; it wasn't the filming, it was the food that they ate. They were just *at school*. That's absolutely central to it."

This commitment to realism went beyond the kids. The headmaster, while not the headmaster at St Helens, was from another local school; Brian Glover (beautifully barbaric PE teacher Mr Sugden) taught down the road.

The stretch for authenticity that Loach demands from his actors, something he has since become known for, was seen in its infancy on *Kes*. He wanted visceral, unfiltered emotion, not acting. One of Loach's tactics — total, genuine surprise — was key in capturing two pivotal scenes at the heart of the film.

"The little boy didn't know that he was going to get caned," admits Loach now of the haunting shot showing a small boy receiving a swift stroke on each palm in the headmaster's office, tears silently coursing down his cheeks during the aftermath. "The thing is, kids were getting caned every day — not that morning as the kids were on holiday — but every day. So

you weren't doing anything that was seen at the time as unusual. He probably didn't cane him as hard as he would have done — because he was a headmaster, he caned people."

The second was the devastating climax of the film when, in revenge for Billy taking his betting money to spend on chips for himself and meat for Kes, Jud kills the bird. "We definitely tried to convince him that we had [killed Kes]," says Loach (and Bradley claims to this day that he did believe they had). In fact, it was a different bird that had died in Edinburgh, been put on ice and the corpse flown in. "We didn't tell him that. He was looking for it and I just said, 'You might want to look in the shed, you might look in the bin.' So he went round and went to the bin and there it was."

Unsurprisingly with a cast made up entirely of locals, the broad, glorious Yorkshire accents are some of the strongest and most accurate ever captured on a film of this kind. Not that distributor United Artists saw this as a positive, necessarily. "Without us knowing they got David and some of the boys down to change it, [to change] some of the lines at the beginning,"





Main: David Bradley as Billy, isolated and with little hope for the future. **Far left, top to bottom:** The little boy who had his palms caned for real; Billy watches bully brother Jud (Freddie Fletcher) with the boys' mum (Lynne Perrie); Billy with Kes. **Left:** Author Barry Hines (right) and his brother Richard (second right) train Freeman, who 'plays' Kes, and stand-in Hardy (sitting on Barry's glove) on set.

says Loach. "It's ridiculous! Turning 'thee' into 'you' — 'What's tha doing?' 'What are *you* doing?' It just destroys it."

True to the spirit of the seven-and-a-half-week shoot, the film premiered at the ABC Cinema in Doncaster, largely ignored save for two critics who championed it. Since, and gradually over five decades, *Kes* has come to be regarded as one of the most important British films of the last century and Ken Loach one of our most important living filmmakers.

STILL SOARING

Almost 50 years on, while the pits have all closed, domestic industry has disappeared entirely and working-class communities are unrecognisable, in many senses, the echoes of Billy Casper and Kes remain.

"The big difference is that Billy Casper would have got a job," says Loach on how Billy would have fared then and now. "Casper would now *not* get a job. There'd be a drug culture that he'd either fall victim to or escape. There'd be an alienation. He'd be disconnected."

Loach blames our age of gadgets, a lack of community and the ensuing isolation. "The community that Billy Casper grew up in is very coherent. People were employed; it may have been in a dangerous and harsh job, but the culture of protecting each other was very strong." But further than that, he identifies our current situation to be the inevitable result of a philosophy that began the day Margaret Thatcher won the election — a commitment to the market and to the interests of big corporations. A commitment not just accepted but reinforced by Blair, Brown and "the whole Labour right wing". So while Loach, somewhat surprisingly, believes there was more hope in *Kes* as there was more security, he believes there is "more *cause* for hope" now with Jeremy Corbyn's Labour party walking back down the path that Thatcher set us on.

The film's original tag line read: "They beat him. They deprived him. They ridiculed him. They broke his heart. But they couldn't break his spirit." And it would seem that in 2016, the spirit of *Kes*, Billy Casper and Ken Loach expressed in that simple tale remains unbroken still.

KES IS OUT ON 7 NOVEMBER ON BLU-RAY



KES
★★★★★
CERT PG

What we said: "Perfectly pitching the screenplay's sensitively woven story and natural ear for dialogue. Loach's low-key take is just the right side of sentimental."
Notable extras: New and archival interviews, a booklet with new writing on the film.

KIM NEWMAN'S VIDEO DUNGEON

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PICK OF THE MONTH
THE NEIGHBOUR

Marcus Dunstan paid his dues scripting *Saw* sequels, then turned writer-director for *The Collector*, which was successful enough to merit a sequel but hasn't quite blossomed into a franchise. Dunstan's *The Neighbour* (which gained the 'u' for its UK release, spelling fans) might once have been a stab at 'Collector 3', since the underrated Josh Stewart returns from the earlier films in a similar role — a professional criminal pitted against psychopathic villainy (his next-door neighbour, who has kidnapped Stewart's wife) which forces him to turn good guy so he can live with himself.

Though it starts with sinister, down-home character business in the manner of *Blue Ruin* or *Cold In July*, *The Neighbour* delivers a more action-orientated, serial-style plot with an escalation of physical threat, peril and escape, as folks in desperate

situations take even more desperate measures. It has twists, some guessable and some out of left field, but the story works thanks to the fierce bond between the leads, with Alex Essoe a gutsy, full partner in crime (and heroism) rather than a token babe who needs rescuing. Stewart simmers credibly as a not-bad guy in a bad business up against a range of terrible people in a worse one and Bill Engvall, usually a redneck comedian, underplays effectively as the menacing bad-guy patriarch.

Dunstan and co-writer Patrick Melton know from their *Saw* days how to turn the screws, and this manages any number of uh-oh moments — including a fight in a shallow grave full of raw mystery meat — and gruesome pay-offs. A smart, tough, bleak little suspense picture with just a sliver of heart.

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"How can a business innovate without killing a couple of civilians?"
Sharktopus Vs Pteracuda

HORROR ANTHOLOGY

If Joe Orton, Mike Leigh and the *Carry On* gang made video nasties, they'd likely resemble the shorts in David McGillivray's *Worst Fears*.

PANDEMIC THRILLER

As 'worm flu' sweeps the world, sisters Sofia Black-D'Elia and Analeigh Tipton are left stranded home alone in *Viral*.

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BINGEWATCH

Each month, our marathon man straps himself to a sofa for a viewing fest. Pray for him

THIS MONTH: SPIDER-MAN

WORDS SIMON CROOK

ILLUSTRATION PETER STRAIN

WATCHING SPIDER-MAN'S evolution as a live-action hero is quite an experience. In fact, it's weirdly similar to Peter Parker's struggles with his own powers: there are soaring highs, wonky landings, skids, scrapes and face-plants into brick walls, but he always gets back up again. Canned after 13 episodes, CBS' '70s series offers an unforgiving lesson in how *not* to adapt Marvel's mascot and is where our Spider-Binge begins.

Nicholas Hammond was pushing 30 when he played Peter Parker, but that's the least of its problems; the analogue era simply couldn't cope. Armed with Silly String web-shooters, wobbly abseiling skills and eyes that look suspiciously like egg poachers, Hammond's Spidey has all the agility of a concrete chimp. The rosey FX are understandable; what's baffling is the vision: for the pilot, which somehow got a UK cinema release, Spidey battles a bank-robbing brainwasher called The Guru. Serving up generic renta-thugs, this Spidey is just another '70s crime-fighter: The Six Million Dollar Man in fancy Spandex.

It wasn't until the CGI boom, some 25 years later, that Spider-Man emerged fully formed. In an age where Marvel's multiverse movies share a uniform style, Sam Raimi's trilogy plays extra-crazed now: they're auteur studio movies, buzzing with Raimi's distinct manic flair. You feel like you're

watching Steve Ditko's panels in cinematic form. Likewise Tobey Maguire's angsty Peter Parker, a winning loser cut straight from the '60s comic. Given Raimi's horror chops, the original flirts with daring ideas (Parker's hormonal howls suggest a werewolf movie in superhero clobber), but I'd argue *Spider-Man 2* is one of the great superhero movies. Urged into epic misdeeds against the will of their saner alter-egos, Spider-Man has a tradition of conflicted schizo villains. Alfred Molina's Doc Ock — fully fleshed, lethal but poignant — remains the gold-standard nemesis. The tragedy is Raimi's comic-opera went so off-key with *Spider-Man 3* and its musical interludes (Spider-Man and tunes don't go: just ask U2). Cursed with an overloaded script, Raimi's less directing, more furiously bashing a plot *piñata*. Hence the finale featuring Venom, Sandman and Green Goblin 2.0: a villain pile-up not seen since *Batman & Robin*.

From Too Much to Too Soon. Released five years later, Marc Webb's *The Amazing Spider-Man* is the *Eternal Sunshine* of superhero movies — Raimi's films are erased, like an inconvenient memory, and replaced with an uncannily identikit origin story. Unlike Maguire's genial geek, Andrew Garfield's Peter Parker is a skaterboy outcast. (Or possibly Peter Parkour: Spidey's free-running stuntwork is the reboot's most striking addition.)

Based on Marvel's millennial *Ultimate Spider-Man*, I find Garfield's emo Parker too worldly to connect. Maybe it's the first Spidey movie to work better out of the suit (Garfield's romance with Emma Stone crackles), but the Dark Knightier, reality-grounded approach stops a fun character from soaring. Neither reboot nor sequel offer a memorable nemesis: Jamie Foxx's Elektro is as underwhelming as Rhys Ifans' Lizard, whose dinosaur super-race master plan seems to have been filched from, of all things, Bob Hoskins' *Super Mario Bros*.

After Sony struck a deal granting Marvel the right to use Spidey last year, Garfield was rapidly recast. Tom Holland's cameo was, for me, the highlight of *Captain America: Civil War*: Peter Parker's barely six months into his crime-fighting hobby, callow, cocky and totally out of his depth as a boy amongst supermen. His rubbish Spider-onesie suit is hilarious. Likewise his, "I've got homework," excuse to Tony Stark.

By harking back to the retro Ditko era, Spider-Man's future suddenly looks bright again. Although he's getting younger and younger with every incarnation. Give it a decade and we'll probably end up with Spider-Toddler.

SPIDER-MAN, SPIDER-MAN 2 AND SPIDER-MAN 3 ARE NEWLY OUT ON BLU-RAY STEELBOOK



STORY OF THE SHOT

E.T.: THE EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL

WORDS IAN FREER

DENNIS MUREN HAS a confession to make about the first time he saw Steven Spielberg's *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial*. "I didn't get it," laughs the ILM visual effects supervisor. "I saw an early version of the film with temporary sound and temporary music and it just didn't work. You could hear the motors on E.T. when he was turning his head." Priced at a thrifty \$10 million *E.T.* was, according to Muren, "low on ILM's totem pole" in early 1982, due to big effects hitters *Star Trek II: The Wrath Of Khan* and the Spielberg-produced *Poltergeist*. Still, Muren and his team created one of cinema's most indelible images: Elliott (Henry Thomas), E.T. in basket, flying his bicycle across a rich full moon.

E.T.'s signature shot was not in Melissa Mathison's screenplay. Instead it sprung directly from Spielberg's imagination, the silhouette idea influenced by Disney's *Peter Pan*. Muren looked at using a mechanised puppet but went with a go-motion approach, an upgrade on traditional stop motion that added realistic blur. Elliott was constructed as a 15 1/2" puppet. His bicycle, based on Kuwahara dirt bike designs, boasted an astonishing level of detail. Even the brakes worked.

"E.T. holds up in large part because there is a hand-made feeling to the movie," says producer Katheen Kennedy. "But there was also a simplicity to what we were doing that was purely in service to story. Elliott and E.T. don't go on a tourist-type viewing during their flight. They go straight to the landing site. It's classic."

Although it appears mid-way through the film, the image was shot after the chase into the sunset that ends the movie. Having learnt from the first flight, ILM programmed less movement in the Elliott puppet, as if he was scared he might dump E.T. out of the basket. Muren also added in bumps to simulate the bicycle being buffeted by currents. "I had it slightly going up hill, not going flat because I thought it would be a little bit more of a challenge, a little bit more optimistic," he says.

Perhaps the biggest challenge was the silvery moon. Muren sent cameraman Mike McAlister to a valley in Nicasio, near ILM, with a huge 1,000mm lens to capture a classic lunar rising. Never knowing just when and where the moon was going to appear, McAlister recalled spending "night after night in the cold". "A lot of reviews said ILM's contribution was seamless," says Kennedy. "It was because we didn't want a sky with a silver moon to say, 'Isn't that a great effects shot?' We wanted it to look like we shot that perfect night moon."

Add John Williams' score, and the moment is a tribute to the power of flight, magic and soaring imaginations. It would become a cultural riffing point — perhaps most memorably *The Naked Gun 2 1/2* sent Richard Griffiths over the moon in a wheelchair — but also gifted the fledgling Amblin Entertainment a good-to-go logo. "That came from the excitement of *E.T.*'s success," claims Kennedy. "It came to define what Amblin was all about." And, to some extent, the power of movies as a whole.

E.T.: THE EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL IS OUT NOW ON DVD, BLU-RAY AND DOWNLOAD



MOVIE MEMOIRS

Nothing but the best:
the Griswolds
hit the road.

Sali Hughes on the films that shaped her life

#5 NATIONAL LAMPOON'S VACATION – THE QUOTE-ALONG FILM



ILLUSTRATION DAVID MAHONEY

IN TERMS OF my own use, personal growth and social development, the greatest invention of the 1970s was not the Walkman, Post-it note, or even the cell phone; it was the VCR machine. Because it was thanks to this clunky silver box, that landed as if from space one Christmas morning in 1984, that I discovered the great joy of learning a film script, specifically that of *National Lampoon's Vacation*, by heart.

Prior to VHS, I knew the words to skipping songs, Roald Dahl's *Revolting Rhymes* and The Beatles' *Abbey Road* in their entirety, but films were a one time-only deal, twice at most. You'd

see new releases in the cinema, enjoy them as a fleeting moment in time, much as you would a pantomime or football match, then wait years for one of the four TV channels to get the screening rights. Now, the game had changed. You could watch films, old and new, over and over, until their dialogue was imprinted on the brain, to be recalled in company. *National Lampoon's Vacation*, with Chevy Chase's hapless middle-class dad trying to get his family to Walley World, became not just a film on which to spunk weeks of sunny school holidays when I should have been out playing, but also a hymn sheet from which to sing, a language to learn. The sauce my brothers and I poured on our fish fingers was now always "Real tomato ketchup, Eddie? Nothing but the best!", every track on the Radio 1 Chart Show was dismissed with, "That song sounds made up," and on, and on, until our father was close to losing his mind.

There's great social currency in quoting, of course. At school, weeks would pass seemingly without anyone saying much that hadn't first been said in a favourite film or TV show. Noisy bus journeys of kids shouting *Police Academy* and *Life Of Brian* quotes, lines from *Blackadder* and *Airplane!*, smacking our cheeks together, sending school dinners shooting from our mouths like John Belushi's zit impersonation in *National Lampoon's Animal House*, reciting the register like Ben Stein's monotonal economics teacher in *Ferris Bueller's*

Day Off. Even the most socially awkward kid could store a good line for every occasion, like a first aid kit for any emergency or ailment. Your ability to join in and be heard was less about your looks, popularity or ownership of Nike trainers, more about the jokes you could recite word-perfect. You didn't even have to be naturally funny or clever; you just had to be able to hit rewind until you'd memorised someone who was.

And you never outgrow it. If anything, the advent of social media and its collective live telly-watching has made me even worse. On Twitter, you gravitate towards fellow nerds who know full well that the *Wall Street* line is not, "Greed is good," but, "Greed, for lack of a better word, is good," or that *Jaws*' Roy Scheider actually says, "You're gonna need a bigger boat," not "we're". Nonetheless, each generation of kids think they invented the art of quoting. I overhear my own repeating lines from *Harry Potter* as though speaking a language in which I'm not already fluent. I find it cheering to see that despite a diet of interminable YouTube videos of unfunny adults playing *Minecraft*, WhatsApp gibberish and Snapchat, the playground is still ruled by those who know the most words from *Pitch Perfect*. So while I stopped being able to help with their maths homework a good two years ago, I have been able to teach them the important stuff: the Walley World anthem. Altogether now... "Who's the moosiest moose we know? MARTY MOOSE!"

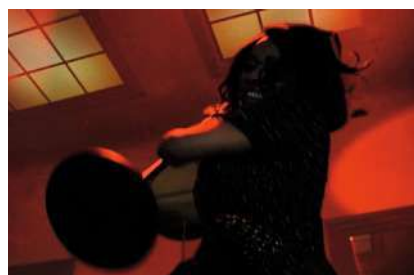
LUKE CAGE

The greatest hits from the Marvel/Netflix series



1 _ TALK AIN'T CHEAP

Characters stopping to deliver monologues can slow a series down, but in *Luke Cage* they're a chance for fictional people to reflect on key moments in African-American history, core to the show. Cottonmouth's (Mahershala Ali) episode one paean to Biggie Smalls is majestic and gorgeously shot.



2 _ MARIAH SCARY

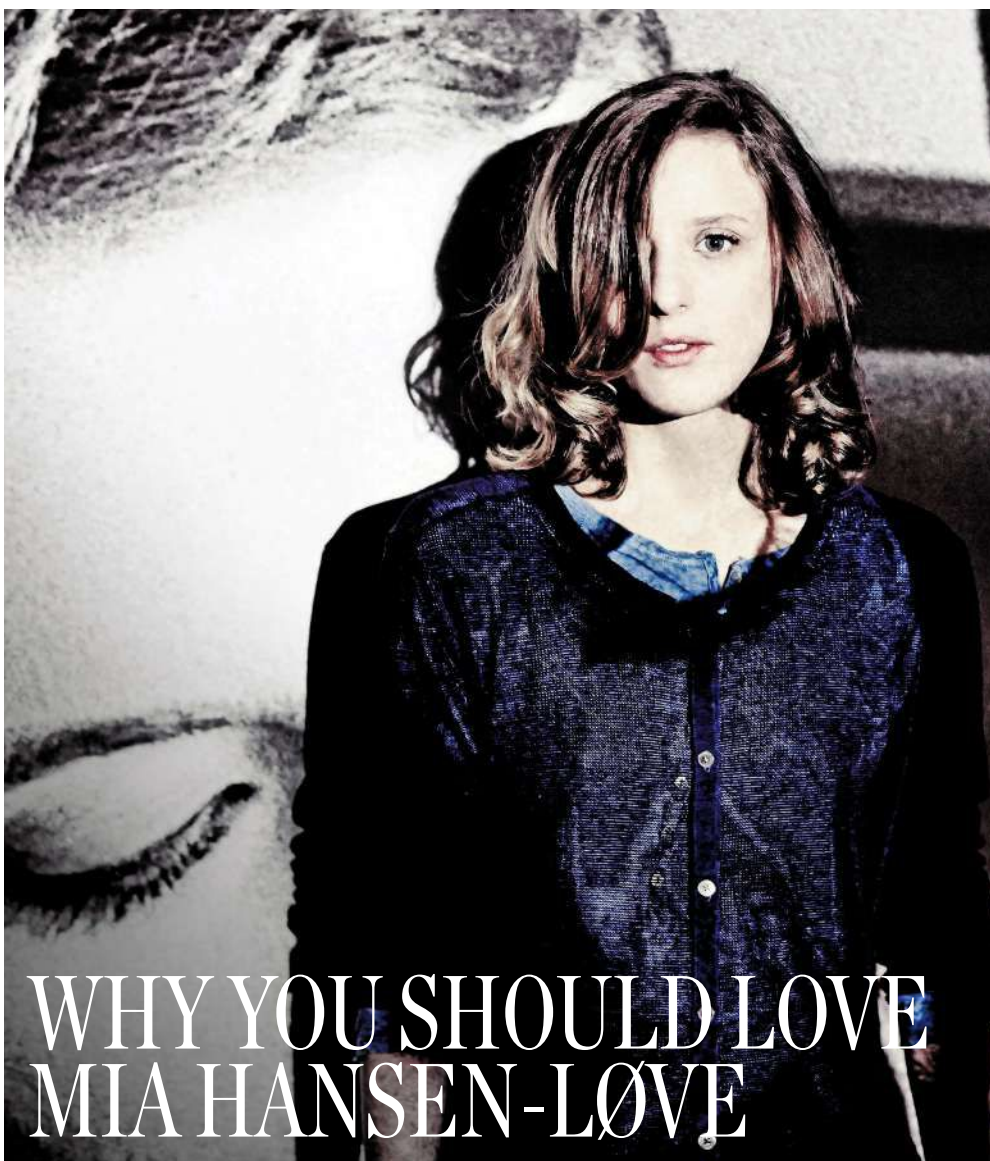
If you snag Alfre Woodard for a morally messy role, like that of shady but kind of well-meaning politician Mariah, don't waste her. Mariah is a fleeting presence in early episodes but grows in power in the season's second half. Her pivotal scene in episode seven is a murderous reveal perfectly played by the actress.



3 _ NICOLA FURY?

Who knew when she showed up in the earliest episodes of *Daredevil* that Rosario Dawson's Claire Temple would become one of the most important parts of the Marvel Universe? She's the link between all three Defenders so far, and the moment in episode 11 when she faces off against an evil killer is richly satisfying.

LUKE CAGE IS STREAMING NOW ON NETFLIX



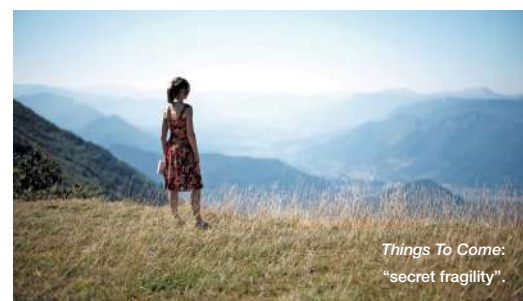
WHY YOU SHOULD LOVE MIA HANSEN-LØVE

Get to know the most exciting new director in European cinema

WORDS IAN FREER

MIA HANSEN-LØVE FIRST got into film because she had a broken heart. "Isn't that the case for everybody?" she laughs. After a four-year relationship ended when she was 19, she got a small role in Olivier Assayas' *Late August, Early September* and was instantly hooked. "I was extremely melancholic but it was like a revolution for me. It felt like when I was on set, life was so much more intense and everything was much more meaningful." Love's loss is cinema's gain, because Hansen-Løve has become one of European cinema's most intriguing new talents. Her five films are by turns compassionate, funny, angry and joyous. Or, in a word: human.

More than any filmmaker today, Hansen-Løve rips her films directly from her own life. "For some people it goes through different layers of changing until it finds its way to fiction," she says. "For me, it's much more direct." *Goodbye First Love* was culled from her own anguished teens. *Eden* was based on her house-music DJ brother Paul. Her latest, *Things To Come*, the story of a fiftysomething philosopher (Isabelle Huppert) going through



Things To Come:
"secret fragility".

a mid-life crisis, is inspired by her mother.

"When I started I had no idea where this woman was going," she says. "There is this ambivalence between wisdom, strength, the self-confidence of the character and her secret fragility. I realised once the film was finished that I was closer to the character than I was first thinking."

People keep telling Hansen-Løve *Things To Come* is "the most French movie I have ever seen in my life". In direct contrast, her next film, *Maya*, about a war reporter held hostage in Syria, will be shot in India. "I like the idea of filmmaking as an adventure," she says. "It's very childish but I think it's part of my relationship to cinema." Long may the Love-in continue.

THINGS TO COME IS OUT ON 7 NOVEMBER ON DVD AND DOWNLOAD

THE CIRCLE IS COMPLETE

27 THINGS WE LEARNED FROM J.J. ABRAMS' NEW *EPISODE VII* AUDIO COMMENTARY

WORDS CHRIS HEWITT

"I HATE DOING THESE kinds of commentaries," says J.J. Abrams, approximately five minutes into his *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* talk track. As opening gambits go, it's a startling one. Especially considering Abrams' commentary (he didn't provide one for the initial home entertainment release) is arguably the major selling point of this new version, eclipsing the 3D presentation and the addition of five new featurettes. Happily, the director soon settles into his task and provides plenty of insight, self-deprecating humour and revelations about *Episode VII*. Here's what we gleaned from this reawakening...

1 — Poe Dameron was meant to die. His disappearance from the crashed TIE Fighter on Jakku was initially meant to be the last we were going to see of the dashing pilot. But Oscar Isaac was wary of taking the role because, according to Abrams, "he died in, like, four other movies in the first act". Abrams and Lawrence Kasdan had once written an outline where Poe survived, "but when Larry and I wrote the script, we just killed him". But co-producer Michelle Rejwan convinced Abrams to restore Poe to life, and Isaac came on.

2 — Abrams is great at pointing out cameos. We all know about the much-vaunted Daniel Craig stormtrooper sequence (although Abrams says he's FN-007 and not JB-007, as some believe). But the director gleefully notes brief appearances by his dad, his father-in-law, *30 Rock*'s Judah Friedlander, his longtime composer Michael Giacchino and, as a stormtrooper who gets blasted by Chewbacca's bowcaster, Radiohead producer Nigel Godrich.

3 — He claims that Gwendoline Christie is inside Captain Phasma's funky armour (which was a rejected Kylo Ren design) throughout, bar one brief shot near the end when she's

jumped by Han Solo and Chewbacca on Starkiller Base.

4 — Abrams admits to reshooting a number of scenes (he calls difficult moments "a bear") in order to nail them. In particular, the relationship between Finn and Rey underwent serious massaging. "When we first started shooting, we hadn't really figured out the proper dynamic," he says. "It was much more contentious... Originally they were much more angry at each other and truthfully, it wasn't working."

5 — One major change was the decision to delay Finn revealing to Rey that he was a stormtrooper. Initially, he did so during their first encounter on Jakku. "Changing their relationship and their attitudes and what they tell each other, I think, helped enormously in bringing forward the sweetness and the relatability these characters needed."

6 — Quite a lot of the film's significant close-ups were added on the fly during reshoots at Abrams' Bad Robot HQ in L.A. Some shots of Rey were filmed on the Bad Robot roof.

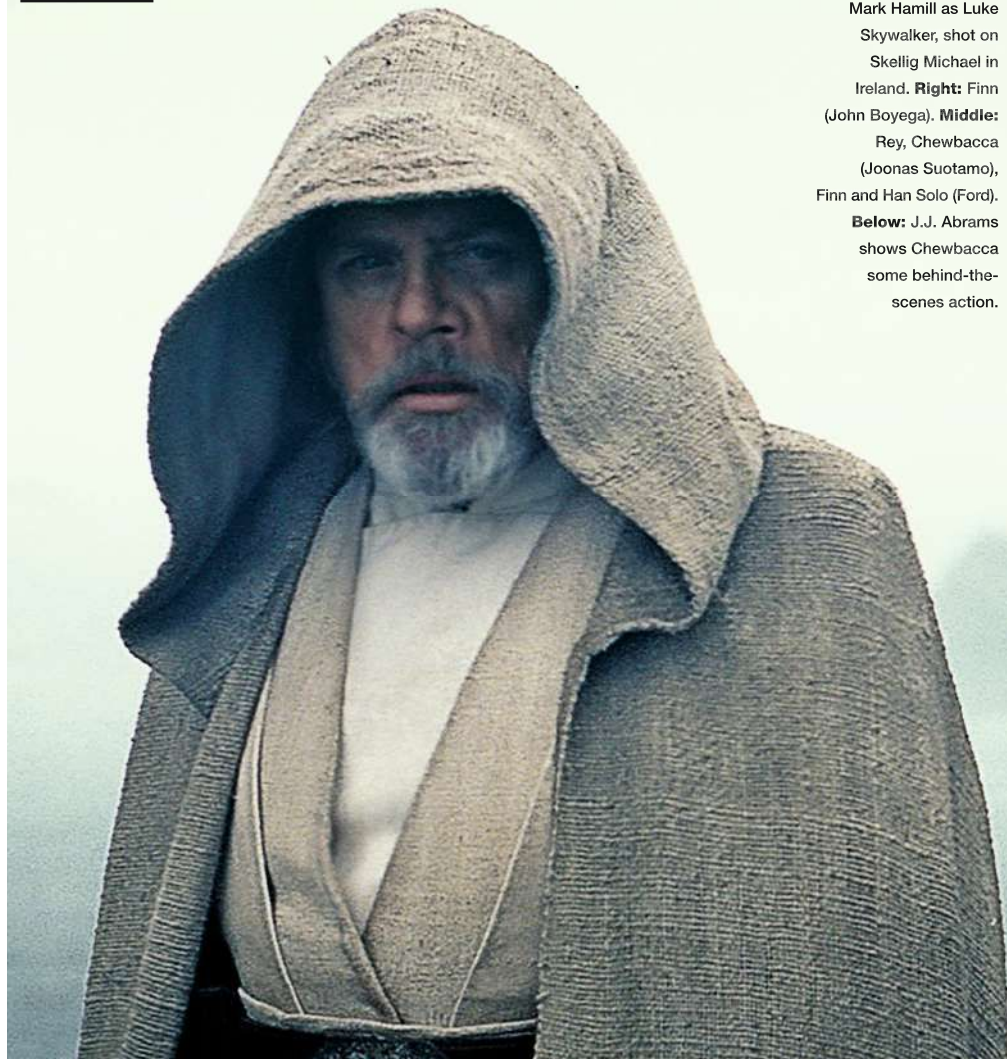
7 — Kylo Ren was meant to unmask much, much earlier, but Abrams decided to hold it back for his confrontation with Rey. This meant that, for the scene where he first talks with Supreme Leader Snoke, Adam Driver was given a CG mask.

8 — He was also unmasked for the scene where we see Kylo talk to the charred helmet of Darth Vader. The shot where Ren drops his mask during his confrontation with a captured Rey on Starkiller Base was initially intended for that earlier scene.

9 — Carrie Fisher was scheduled to return much earlier as Leia, sending Maisie Richardson-Sellers' Korr Sella to Hosnian Prime. (A snippet of this earlier Leia scene has been released as

Kylo Ren (Adam Driver) discovers that Rey (Daisy Ridley) is a Force to be reckoned with.





Mark Hamill as Luke Skywalker, shot on Skellig Michael in Ireland. **Right:** Finn (John Boyega). **Middle:** Rey, Chewbacca (Joonas Suotamo), Finn and Han Solo (Ford). **Below:** J.J. Abrams shows Chewbacca some behind-the-scenes action.



a deleted scene.) Interestingly, the suggestion to cut this was made by Michael Arndt, the writer who wrote the first draft of the screenplay, after Abrams showed him an early version of the film.

10 — Several ideas during the film, including the pivotal moment where Rey summons Luke Skywalker's lightsaber to her during the climactic showdown with Kylo Ren, are credited to Abrams' producing partner Bryan Burk.

11 — Steven Spielberg suggested that, after Finn watches the TIE Fighter get sucked into the sand by an unseen Jakku beastie, it should suddenly explode.

12 — George Lucas famously showed his rough cut of *Star Wars* to his Movie Brat friends, including Spielberg, Martin Scorsese and Brian De Palma. Abrams seems to have been consciously trying to echo that vibe; he also cites advice from Ava DuVernay, who suggested one specific shot of Rey towards the film's climax.

13 — One more major director note: it was John Lasseter's idea to give BB-8 more physical comedy. This led directly to the 'thumbs-up' gesture, perhaps the film's single strongest gag.

14 — Abrams is excellent on Rey's nightmarish vision of the Force in Maz Kanata's castle. Calling

it 'the Forceback', he reveals Rey was at one point meant to 'see' Vader fighting Luke on Cloud City. "We wanted it to be a more personal story."

15 — The brief audio cameo from Obi-Wan Kenobi (another Bryan Burk idea) is an amalgamation of Alec Guinness and Ewan McGregor. McGregor's line, "These are your first steps," was specially recorded. Guinness, who died in 2000, ended up in the film via ingenious means for his one-word contribution, "Rey." "We found a reading of him saying 'great'," reveals Abrams, "and we took away the 'G' and 'T'. It was the perfect performance!"

16 — There was much speculation that the opening shot would see Luke Skywalker's lightsaber, lost during his duel with Vader on Cloud City, floating through space. Abrams confirms the original script did start with this, and there was much exposition about how the blue 'saber ended up with Maz Kanata. "All that became backstory and in fact is thrown away in one line now in the movie."

17 — The director constantly praises John Williams' score, reserving special praise for his *March Of The Resistance* theme. Abrams reveals Williams presented him with a leather-bound copy of that particular score as a gift after the movie was complete.

18 — Your eyes do not deceive you — that really is Dame Harriet Walter tending to Chewbacca's wounds on the Rebel base. Abrams says she had another scene, which was cut.

19 — Abrams reveals how *Hamilton*'s Lin-Manuel Miranda came to write the songs played at Maz Kanata's castle. John Williams was meant to write them, but asked for an outside party to come in so he could fully focus on the movie's score. Abrams called Miranda... and even ended up performing on the tracks with him.

20 — Abrams says that he played the 'Binary Sunset' theme on his phone as he filmed Mark Hamill's appearance as Luke at the end of the movie, and was "almost brought to tears".

21 — For much of the movie, Chewbacca is played by Swedish basketball player Joonas Suotamo. Helpfully, for completists, Abrams points out the scenes where Peter Mayhew dons the fur and bandolier. These include the bit where Chewie tries to throttle Finn, and the last-minute rescue on Starkiller Base.

22 — The shot that launched a thousand slash-fiction stories, of Finn and Poe Dameron running past each other as they prepare for the Rebel assault, was actually filmed on the fly while the crew were prepping another shot.

23 — Abrams talks for the first time about the death of Han Solo, calling it "inevitable" but also a "crazy, painful idea".

24 — Shooting Han Solo's death scene was hard because of Harrison Ford's widely publicised on-set injuries — including a broken leg. "I hated the idea of seeing him vulnerable at all," he says. "So this was hard for everyone to do even though we knew it was essential and necessary."

25 — He admits to cutting two lingering farewells between Solo and Leia/Chewbacca, citing them as too "on the nose".

26 — Abrams believes Kylo Ren — aka Ben Solo — doesn't actually confront his father with the intention of killing him. "I don't think in this moment that it's a put-on," he says. "I think Ben is legitimately going to give up." Ultimately, though, "Darkness takes over."

27 — In the aftermath of, y'know, skewering his dad through the chest with a lightsaber and then sending him toppling over a bridge "ten miles above the ground with no railings", Abrams believes Kylo Ren regrets his Dark Side-influenced decision. Could that regret echo through *Episode VIII*?

STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS — COLLECTOR'S EDITION IS OUT ON 31 OCTOBER ON BLU-RAY

THE
EMPIRE
VERDICT

STAR WARS:
THE FORCE
AWAKENS

★★★★

CERT 12

What we said: "By the end, this finds fresh ingredients to add to the *Star Wars* formula, strengthening and deepening it. The prequels this ain't. We can all breathe again."

Notable extras: Abrams commentary, deleted scenes, featurettes.



LISTEN TO YOUR FRIEND BILLY ZANE

He's a cool guy. He's trying to help you

Hey Billy

Love your work, love this column. You really are a cool dude, and I need your help.

My girlfriend and I have been together for about four years, and it's going great. But I've been offered the chance of a lifetime — the chance to live and work in the US. It's for a year at least, but my girlfriend can't come with me. We want to try the long-distance relationship thing, but I'm really worried. I've seen it go wrong so many times. I don't want that to happen to us. What should I do?

Yours, **WH**

Thank you for your kind words, ol' boy! My advice is this. Read how you describe both your relationship and this opportunity in your very question. Your answer may lay within. Are you afraid and questioning if you should even take the job or afraid of what may happen to the relationship when you do? There is nothing to fear but... everything, apparently. Do it, man! You are being paid to work and live in the States? Visas and all? If the pay is good, fly her out and you back when you can. If not, but the other perks are tempting, find a way, get creative. Many folks do it to great success. To quote The Jam, "This is the modern world." If this love is that strong it will not only survive but strengthen because of it. Perhaps it won't even be an issue or a test of your resolve. However, if it's been four years and not really advancing in the seriousness stakes and there are no kids? Take the gig. Break it off gently, save your money and be a free agent in a free land, son, and let her find a good local lad who can provide the TLC she deserves. If that scares you, then try to make it work. Suck it and see, as they say. You may both get more pleasure, mutual, and self-respect out of this exercise whatever you choose and

whatever develops, but for God's sakes, man, don't be afraid.

Hi Billy

I think my mum and dad prefer my younger brother to me. They're always spoiling him, buying him stuff, and praising his grades even though mine are just as good. He's six years younger than me, and they were told they couldn't have any kids after me, so I think they see him as this great gift. I love him so much, but it's getting me down. Should I just confront my parents about this? I don't want to bottle it up forever.

Yours, **MS**

Absolutely bring those totally hurtful feelings you are wrestling with to their attention. One question: is it causing problems with your brother in that he recognises the imbalance of affection and feels guilty or odd, or he doesn't notice and you are resenting him? If it's the former, and you discuss it with him and he realises this too, you should both bring it to their attention together. If it's the latter and you feel quite alone with this, bring it up to him first and see what he thinks about it. But discuss it. It will probably be awkward for your parents who may back-pedal or cover, but know it may simply be true. Life is not always fair. It's a shame they cannot find a way to express their love for you in a manner you may recognise or desire, but an open dialogue about preferences may help. Otherwise, do what millions of compensating Alphas do: kick ass in anything you choose! Just be very conscious of learning how to be a much more emotionally intelligent and responsible parent and never recycle that lame behaviour with your children.

SEND YOUR QUESTIONS TO BILLY ZANE VIA [BILLY@EMPIREMAGAZINE.COM](mailto:billy@empiremagazine.com). BILLY HAS DONATED HIS FEE FOR THIS COLUMN TO CHARITY



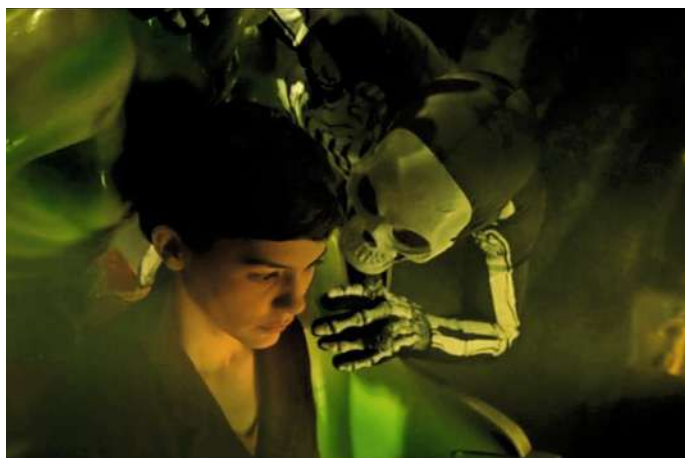
THE FIRST-TAKE CLUB

Filling in those filmic blind spots, one person at a time

#5 AMÉLIE

THE IDEA OF The First-Take Club is simple. Every month, we ask someone to select a film they haven't seen from Empire's 301 Greatest Movies Of All Time list (published in 2014). Then they watch it and tell us what they thought. This month's inductee is Ian Rankin, one of Britain's finest novelists and best known as the creator of the hugely successful John Rebus series. Read a Rebus novel and you'll know Rankin is a man with his finger on the pop-culture pulse, so we worried he might have seen the whole list. Turns out one had escaped his gaze: a French movie renowned for its whimsy, achingly cool lead character and ace score. It is, of course, *Amélie*. So, Ian, what did you make of the film our readers deemed the 68th-greatest ever made?

Mysteries are central to my work as a crime writer, yet here's one I'm struggling to unravel: just why I hadn't seen *Amélie*. A few years back, I was invited to be guest curator at the (small-but-perfectly-formed) Cromarty Film Festival. I had to pick one film I thought might be new to the audience and which they would fall in love with. I chose *MicMac*s by director Jean-Pierre Jeunet. It is one of my favourite comedies, and a film of near-endless invention and brio. I'd also been a fan of his earlier film *Delicatessen*. Yet I'd not watched *Amélie* — a film my wife has seen at least once and which my son Jack rates (with *The Big Lebowski*) as one of his two favourite films. So why was I immune for so long? One clue may be the DVD artwork. It's almost too cute, with doe-eyed



Audrey Tautou channelling Audrey Hepburn, albeit with a Gallic twist. It looks like a nice film about a nice person doing nice things. I think I got the notion it was a charming romance and a love-letter to Paris, and neither of those fills me with *joie de vivre*. But I should have remembered *MicMac's* has some steel at its heart, and that Jeunet worked on *Alien: Resurrection* and *The City Of Lost Children* — neither the fluffiest of confections.

Now that I've finally watched *Amélie*, we must go back to the DVD again, and a prominent quote on the front from a film magazine other than *Empire*. It reads, "Quite simply it's perfect." Well, quite simply, it ain't, but I'm still glad I spent time with it. Audrey Tautou is the personification of pixie-like charm and quirky innocence. Paris

looks stunning (and unbelievably empty for the most part). The saturated colours work well, and it's a film made by people with an obvious passion for moviemaking. I even laughed out loud at a couple of moments (both of them featuring sexual congress, if memory serves). And yet...

Maybe it tries a little bit too hard. No character is allowed not to be eccentric, from the artist with brittle bones to the boorish shopkeeper, not to mention Mathieu Kassovitz as a young man who fills albums with rejected offerings from Photo-Me booths. Jeunet throws the kitchen sink at the viewer, including objects in Amélie's bedroom suddenly coming to life, and additional talking photographs. Her pursuit of the man she's fallen for is drawn-out and ridiculously serpentine,

while she fixes up one of her workmates at the café-bar with a customer whose manifest hang-ups ensure it will end in tears. Added to which her revenge on the shopkeeper didn't convince me for a moment. But Paris does look magical, there is some ingenious plotting, and the soundtrack is great. It is two hours long and started to feel it towards the end, but it is watchable, entertaining and so very, very French. I viewed it alongside Jack, who was seeing it for maybe the fifth or sixth time and seemed transfixed throughout. I liked it well enough, though it will never replace *MicMac's* in my affections. *C'est vrai, mes copains*.

RATHER BE THE DEVIL, IAN RANKIN'S 21ST JOHN REBUS NOVEL, IS OUT ON 3 NOVEMBER IN HARDBACK

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|--------------------|-----|
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| Guillermo del Toro | 9 |
| Werner Herzog | 9 |
| Christian Slater | 8.5 |
| Bryan Singer | 8.5 |
| John Waters | 8 |

1 What is The Woman In Black's real name?
Jennet Humfrye. I remember that quite well. And it's spelled in a weird way. I've got a fairly good memory.
Correct.

2 What is the first thing you say as Harry Potter, in The Philosopher's Stone?
Dudley rushes down the stairs... It's either, "Yes, Uncle Vernon," or, "Yes, Aunt Petunia," because I'm making breakfast. I'll go for, "Yes, Aunt Petunia." I actually saw that scene not very long ago. I was someplace that only had one English channel on TV and that was the film that was on, so I watched it for a bit and then switched over.
Correct.

3 What is the last thing you say as Harry Potter?
In the last film? "It's not been boring, has it?" [Hears the answer] Oh, because I'm Old Harry! Trick! Tricky!
The correct answer is, "Ready?"

4 In your episode of Extras, you take a packet of cigarettes from your pocket. What brand are they?
I'm pretty sure they were Marlboro Lights. I probably really wanted to smoke them at the time, but I couldn't because I was with my parents and I was just fixating on them. They were very much given to me by the prop department. They weren't mine.
Correct.

5 What is the name of the fake film-within-a-film in Trainwreck?
The Dogwalker. I'm doing well so far!
Correct.

6 In Horns, your character Ig goes into a bar looking for information. What is the name of that bar?
Ooh. I think you might have got me there. I should remember that, but I was too busy looking at myself in the coolest shot of my career, which is the shot of me walking out of that bar with it all smoking and burning behind me.
The correct answer is Chieftain Pub.

7 In What If, Wallace emails Chantry a recipe for Fool's Gold sandwiches. What is that recipe?
"Take a loaf of Italian white bread, hollow out the inside. Fill it with an entire jar of peanut butter, an entire jar of jam, stuff it with crispy bacon, then coat the outside of the loaf of bread with butter and then stick it in the oven." You would think that would be really hard to remember, but the amount of times I had to trot that recipe out on that press tour is why I remember it so well. I really knew that. It serves eight to ten people, or the line in the film is "or one Elvis".
Correct.

8 You provided a voice for The Simpsons' Treehouse Of Horror in 2010. What were you credited as?
Daniel Ratfink. They always do weird credits on

Hallowe'en episodes and I think they ran it by me. Radcliffe's a hard name to do a spooky pun of. I don't know... Madcliffe, maybe?
Correct.

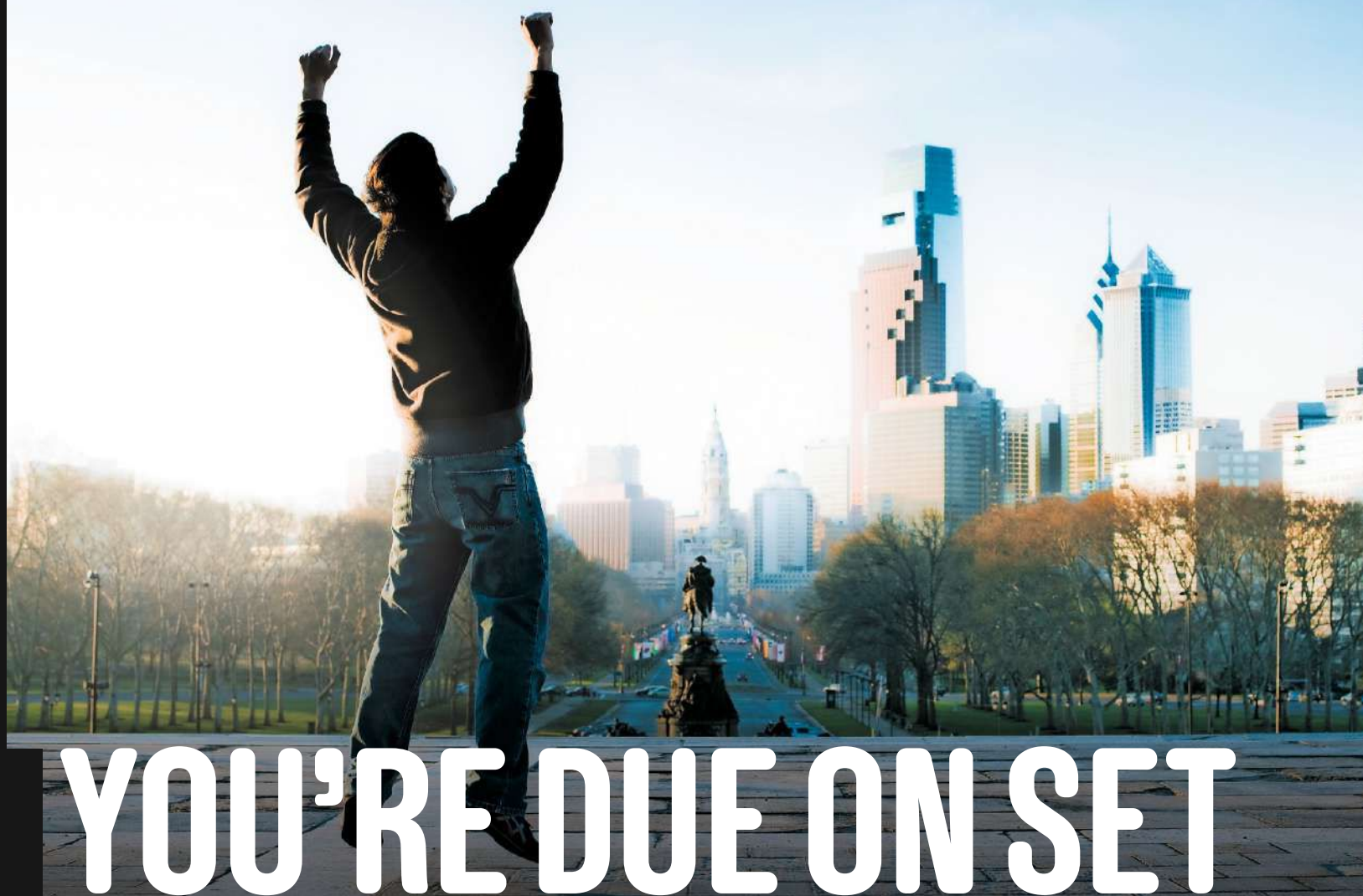
9 What does Geoffrey Rush make you for breakfast at the end of The Tailor Of Panama?
Am I not just having cereal? "Bacon and eggs, Dad! Go on, Geoffrey!" I have not seen that film. I've never seen it. I was not allowed to read the script because it had naughty bits in it.
The correct answer is pancakes.

10 Complete your contribution to The Third Man on The Duckworth Lewis Method's Sticky Wickets: "In the shadow of a doorway she is standing like a lost child. An old woman is screaming, the crowd's becoming hostile..."
Nope. Absolutely not. Not a chance. Dammit. Is this post-2012? Nothing after that is in there.
The correct answer is, "My thoughts have been diluted like a 2/6 novella. Am I in a field in England or in the dark streets of Vienna?"

DANIEL RADCLIFFE SCORES 6

"I'll take that. It's not the nine or ten I was aiming for, but those were genuinely difficult questions that I didn't count on. Well done."

IMPERIUM IS OUT ON 4 NOVEMBER ON DOWNLOAD, AND 7 NOVEMBER ON DVD AND BLU-RAY



YOU'RE DUE ON SET

Give your US holiday a film-themed tweak with these location-scouted destinations

IF ALL THE world's a stage — as some playwright once put it — then America is one gigantic, continent-sized movie set. It's the home of Hollywood and Humphrey Bogart, *Star Wars* and Star-Lord, Greta Garbo and *The Goonies*. It's ripe ground, in fact, for a film-inspired vacation — and here, American Airlines can help. The world's largest airline flies direct from London to LA, New York JFK, Chicago, Philadelphia and many more — not to mention offering a huge network of internal US flights, with over 240 destinations in North America alone. Here are three cities, in particular, worthy of the cinematic pilgrim.

ROCKY

LOCATION: PHILADELPHIA

Pound-for-pound, *Rocky* is the best boxing movie ever made — yes, even counting *Raging Bull* — and more to the point, it's intrinsically Philadelphian. It's impossible to imagine Rocky (Sylvester Stallone) going the distance in the ring without a training montage exploring Philadelphia's frosty streets.

Still, even the Italian Stallion had cheat

days, so before getting into shape, probably best to sample one of Philly's famous Philly cheesesteaks. You may as well go for the original (and Rocky's favourite), Pat's King Of Steaks on East Passyunk Avenue. Or, for a more traditional Italian dining experience, head a few blocks east to the historic Victor Cafe — reconfigured as 'Adrian's' in the films — where opera-singing waiters will bring you cooking from the old country accompanied by an aria or two.

But let's be honest: it's all a warm-up for the main event, the title fight, the headline bout at the Philadelphia Museum Of Art. It's customary to approach Rocky's most iconic location with a jog down Benjamin Franklin Parkway (though unlike Rocky, you may not have a crowd of adoring schoolchildren following you). Then, pay your respects to the Rocky Statue, commissioned by Stallone himself for *Rocky III*, now a permanent and much-loved fixture of the city. Finally, run up the 72 so-called Rocky Steps to the museum, throw a few air-punches, hold your arms aloft, and feel like a champ. It has to be done. (Drinking a pint of raw eggs: optional.)





Above: Channel Stallone on Philly's Rocky Steps.
Left: The Rocky Statue.
Right, from top: Chicago's skyline...; ...And Art Institute; Central Park, NYC; Katz's Delicatessen, where Sally shocked Harry.



FERRIS BUELLER'S DAY OFF

LOCATION: CHICAGO

Few films sell a city as well as *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, an ode to both Chicago and free-spirited truancy. The film's writer-director, John Hughes, described it as his love letter to the city, "not just the architecture, but the spirit" — and it's easy to see why. Start your own Day Off as Ferris did at the Art Institute Of Chicago, and take in works by Monet, Seurat, Hopper and Picasso. The gallery attendants might not be so thrilled if you strike a Ferris-style pose, though.

Then it's just half a dozen blocks across town to the Willis Tower (formerly the Sears Tower), where you can ride up 103 floors to the Skydeck and admire the jaw-dropping view. On a clear day, you can see as far as Indiana and Michigan; on a windy day — most days in the Windy City — you can feel the tower sway in the breeze.

Finish off your trip at the Daley Plaza, where, in the shadow of the huge Picasso sculpture, you can recreate Ferris' song-and-dance parade finale, if you feel so inclined. It's a bit childish and stupid — but then, as the prophet Bueller once taught, "so is high school".

WHEN HARRY MET SALLY

LOCATION: NEW YORK

It's loud, it's hectic, it has a subway system that doesn't make a lick of sense — but there's something undeniably romantic about New York City, a quality recognised by Nora Ephron and Rob Reiner in the utterly charming *When Harry Met Sally*. Embarking on your own Manhattan romance? Start with a stroll through the arrestingly beautiful Central Park. For the true Harry/Sally experience, visit in the autumn (sorry, 'fall') when the park turns glorious shades of auburn; and to make it even more authentically Ephronian, exchange stories about sex dreams with your companion. Unless it's your mum.

Situated within Central Park's borders is the Metropolitan Museum Of Art. With over two million items in its collection, you could easily spend your entire trip perusing its labyrinthine halls — but be sure to visit the huge Temple Of Dundur exhibit, where Harry tried his hand at some goofy flirting before asking Sally out.

Most importantly, head down to the Lower East Side for a slap-up meal at New York institution Katz's Delicatessen. The kosher-style diner has hosted plenty of celebrity customers over its 128-year history, but few are as esteemed as Meg Ryan, whose fake orgasm is the stuff of comedy legend — a sign hangs above the table where the scene was filmed. You can indeed have what she's having — one of Katz's famed pastrami sandwiches, that is.

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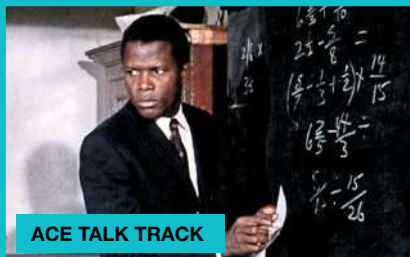
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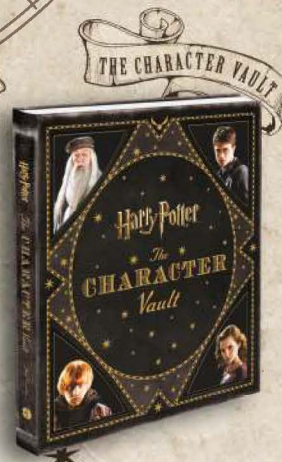
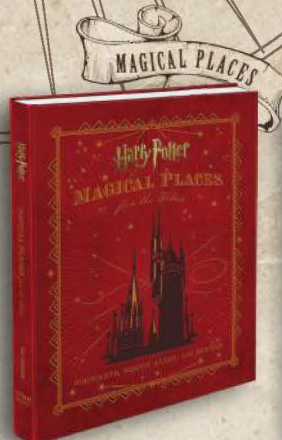
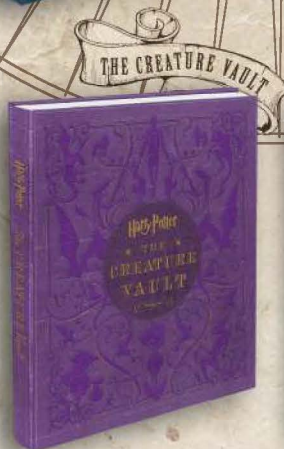
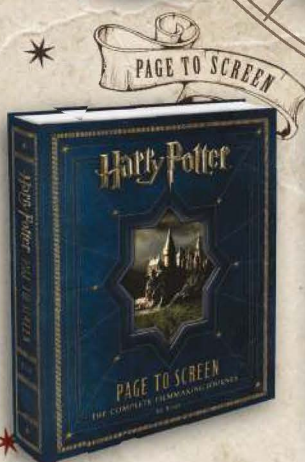
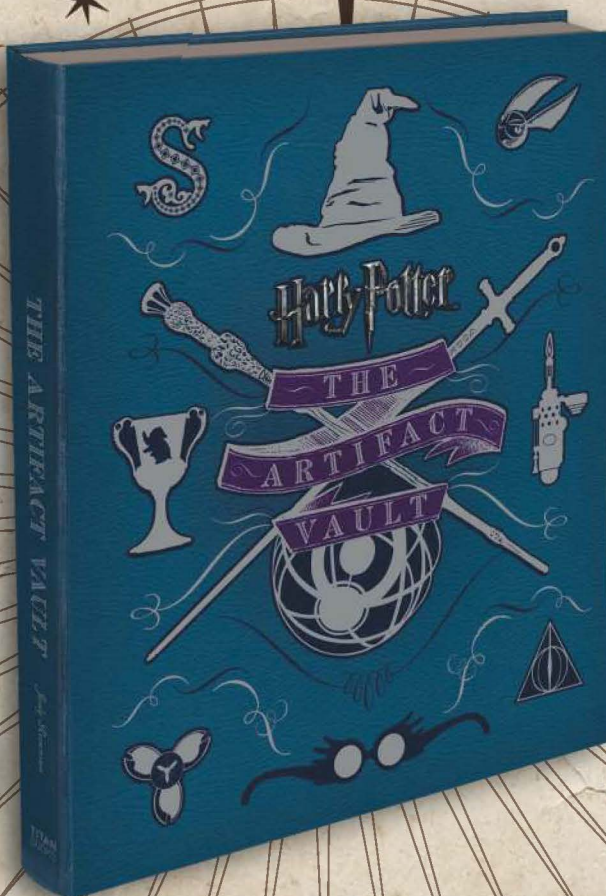
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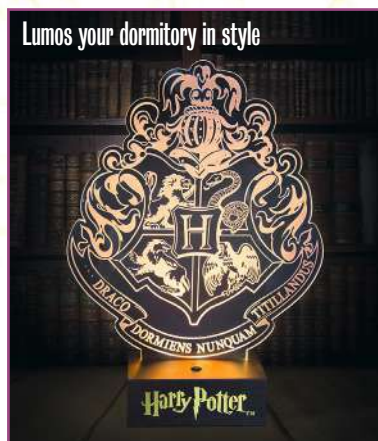


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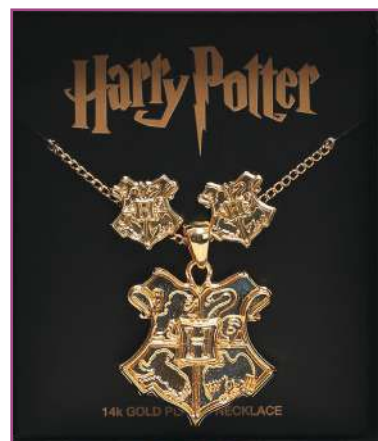
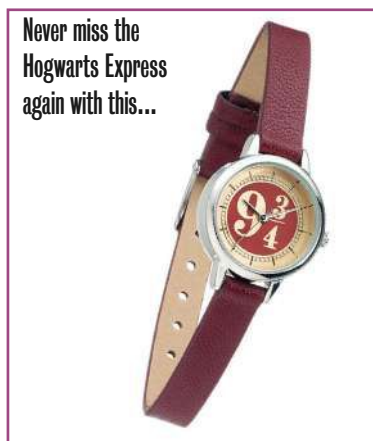
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ELVIS & NIXON IS OUT NOW ON DOWNLOAD, AND ON 31 OCTOBER ON DVD

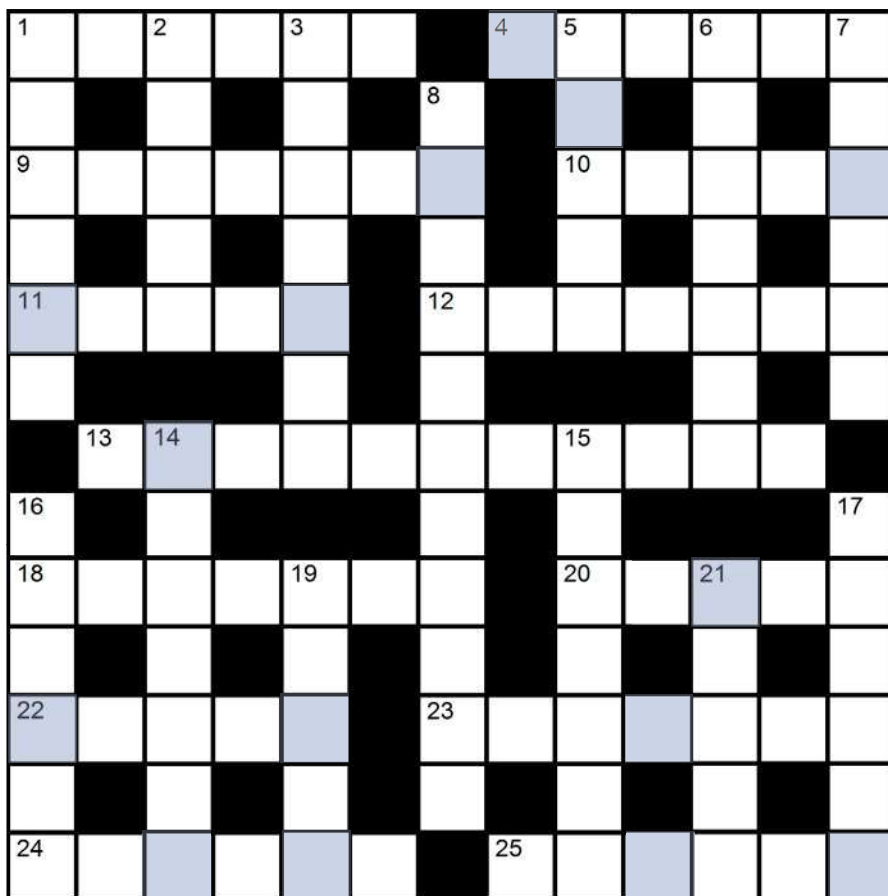
COMPETITION ENDS 21 NOVEMBER

HOW TO ENTER Take the letters from each coloured square and rearrange them to form the name of an actor, actress, director or character. Text 'EMPIRE' to 83070, followed by your answer, name and address (with a space between each element of your message!). Texts cost 50p plus standard operator costs. Lines close at midnight, 21 November. Winners are selected at random. See below for terms and conditions.

NOVEMBER ANSWERS **ACROSS:** 1 The BFG, 4 Beyond, 9 Ed Helms, 10 Akira, 11 Ennio, 12 Missing, 13 Dog Soldiers, 18 The Help, 20 Frida, 22 Lloyd, 23 Airport, 24 Stolen 25 Poison. **DOWN:** 1 The Net, 2 Ethan, 3 Falcons, 5 Evans, 6 Olivier, 7 Django, 8 A Simple Plan, 14 Oyelowo, 15 Inferno, 16 Stills, 17 Parton, 19 Eddie, 21 Irons. **ANAGRAM MIKE COLTER**

TERMS AND CONDITIONS: One entry per person. Texts cost 50p + standard network rate. Ask the bill payer's permission before entering. Entries must be received before 22 November or will not be valid (but the cost of the text may still be charged). One winner will be selected at random. The model of the TV and Blu-ray may vary. Competition promoted by Bauer Consumer Media Limited t/a Empire ("Empire"). Empire's choice of winner is final and no correspondence will be entered into in this regard. The winner will be notified, by phone (on the number the text was sent), between seven and ten days after the competition ends. Empire will call the winner a maximum of three times and leave one message. If the winner does not answer the phone or respond to the message within 14 days of the competition's end, Empire will select another winner and the original winner will not win a prize. Entrants must be over 18, resident in the UK and not be employed by Empire. The prize is non-negotiable with no cash alternative. Empire is not responsible for late delivery or unsatisfactory quality of the prize. Entrants agree to the collection of their personal data in accordance with Empire's privacy policy: <http://www.bauerdatapromise.co.uk/>. Winner's personal details will be given to prize provider to arrange delivery of the prize. Bauer reserves the right to amend or cancel these terms or any aspect of the competition (including the prize) at any time if required for reasons beyond its control. Any questions, please email empire@bauermedia.co.uk. Complaints will not be considered if made more than 30 days after the competition ends. Winner's details available on request (after the competition ends) by emailing empire@bauermedia.co.uk. For full Ts&Cs see <http://www.bauerlegal.co.uk/competition-terms.html>.

CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1 Michael Caine appeared in both this 1972 mystery thriller and its 2007 remake (6)
- 4 Agrees to form a great high school musical (6)
- 9 Filmwise, he took a long walk to freedom (7)
- 10 Film that won the Best Picture Oscar in 2006 (5)
- 11 Watts who was Diana in 2013 (5)
- 12 Sophie, once a resident at Hotel Rwanda (7)
- 13 Gemma Arterton played the lead character in this Posy Simmonds adaptation (5,6)
- 18 She was twice one of Charlie's angels (4,3)
- 20 Sounds like a dance, this Alaska-set John Sayles film (5)
- 22 Williams, was he really once cast as Popeye? (5)
- 23 Film that linked Marilyn Monroe with "a raging torrent of emotion" (7)
- 24 Peter's been turned around for Meryl (6)
- 25 This Kirsten Dunst film is also known as *All I Wanna Do* (6)

DOWN

- 1 Rachel Roberts played the title role in this Al Pacino film (6)
- 2 Morricone located amid a Sean Penn-Ionesco get-together (5)
- 3 Tom Cruise/John Grisham thriller (3,4)
- 5 He and his brothers were directed by Luchino Visconti (5)
- 6 Isabelle Huppert portrayed an ex-nun in this non-professional-sounding release (7)
- 7 *Sleepless In Seattle* director Nora (6)
- 8 The fifth in a series but the fourth for Matt Damon (5,6)
- 14 —: *Paradise Lost*, movie starring Benicio Del Toro (7)
- 15 In which Ewan McGregor voiced a pigeon (7)
- 16 This film introduced Jay and Silent Bob (6)
- 17 Danny Aiello and Angelina Jolie's desert moon (6)
- 19 Could be Hope, could be Jessica (5)
- 21 Colin Farrell and Jamie Foxx's city of vice (5)

THE EMPIRE CLASSIC SCENE

8 MILE CHOSEN BY JASON ISAACS



"There are so many brilliant scenes from the late Curtis Hanson, that most eclectic of directors, but I'm going with the final rap battle of *8 Mile*. The last act is a bravura sequence, beautifully shot, structured and played, where Eminem's Jimmy finally shows us what the fuss has been about for the previous hour-and-a-half. As he lays himself bare, exposes all his secrets and stuns his opponent, it's Jimmy's, Eminem's and all of our stories. And Curtis Hanson proving yet again that there was literally nothing he couldn't do as a director."

INT. THE SHELTER — NIGHT

It's the final of the rap battle. Jimmy (Eminem) faces off against bitter rival Papa Doc (Anthony Mackie). Papa Doc wins the coin toss and insists Jimmy go first. The MC, Future (Mekhi Phifer), cues the beat. Jimmy stares at Papa Doc. Then turns to the crowd.

JIMMY: Now everybody from the 313, Put your motherfucking hands up and follow me, Everybody from the 313 put your motherfucking hands up, look, look, now while he stands tough, Notice that this man did not have his hands up, This free world got you gassed up,

Now who's afraid of the big bad wolf,
1, 2, 3 and to the 4, 1 pac, 2 pac, 3 pac, 4, 4 pac,
3 pac, 2 pac, 1, you're pac, he's pac, no pacs, none.

This guy ain't no motherfucking MC,
I know everything he's got to say against me,
I am white, I am a fucking bum, I do live in
a trailer with my mom, my boy Future is
an Uncle Tom,
I do got a dumb friend named Cheddar Bob who
shoots himself in his leg with his own gun,
I did get jumped by all six of you chumps,
And Wink did fuck my girl, I'm still standing here
screaming, "FUCK THE FREE WORLD!"
Don't ever try to judge me, dude,
You don't know what the fuck I've been through.

But I know something about you,
You went to Cranbrook, that's a private school,
What's the matter, dawg? You embarrassed?
This guy's a gangster? His real name's Clarence.

And Clarence lives at home with both parents,
And Clarence's parents have a real good marriage,
This guy don't wanna battle, he's shook,
'Cause ain't no such things as half-way crooks.
He's scared to death,
He's scared to look in his fucking yearbook,
fuck Cranbrook.

The beat drops out.

Fuck the beat, I go a cappella, fuck a Papa Doc,
fuck a clock, fuck a trailer, fuck everybody
Fuck y'all if you doubt me,
I'm a piece of fucking white trash, I say it proudly.
And fuck this battle, I don't wanna win, I'm outta.
Here, tell these people something they don't
know about me.

He throws the mic to Papa Doc. The crowd goes wild. Papa Doc stands there, stunned.

FUTURE: Papa Doc! What you gonna do? DJ!
DJ! A minute-and-a-half. Spin that shit! Spin
that shit!

The DJ lays down a beat. Papa Doc lifts the microphone to his lips.

PAPA DOC: Yo.

He looks at the crowd, who chant at him. Papa Doc hands the mic to Future, conceding defeat.

FUTURE: Oh, oh, oh, oh, we got a new
champion! We got a new champion! 313! 313!

The crowd chants as Jimmy celebrates.



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ROBBIE COLLIN, THE TELEGRAPH

"ELECTRIFYING"

DAVID SEXTON, EVENING STANDARD

"MESMERISING"

BRIAN VINER, DAILY MAIL

"EXQUISITE"

ELLE

SCREENPLAY BY TOM FORD DIRECTED BY TOM FORD

AMY ADAMS JAKE GYLLENHAAL MICHAEL SHANNON AARON TAYLOR-JOHNSON

NOCTURNAL ANIMALS

FADE TO BLACK



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